

ИГОРЬ

БУНИЧ

ЛАБИРИНТЫ
БЕЗУМИЯ

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LABYRINTH OF MADNESS

FOREWORD

55 years ago, on June 22, 1941, another national catastrophe struck our country, the tragedy and scale of which is unlikely to ever be forgotten.

Industrial progress, which swept the world like a hurricane in the second half of the 19th century and allowed the great powers to produce mountains of deadly weapons, created a new art of achieving world domination through military force.

Mankind, catapulted on a wave of electricity and steam almost from the Middle Ages to the industrial age, was unable to navigate the new environment, as a result of which the nineteenth century, which was romantic in its essence, was destroyed by the First World War. This opened the way for totalitarian regimes that saw in the hecatombs of forged weapons the very historical chance that the aged European monarchs failed to take advantage of.

With the enthusiasm of children sliding down an ice hill, the communists, and behind them the Nazis, led their peoples along the path that seemed to them the shortest way to achieve their cherished goal - world domination. In fact, both regimes fell into deadly labyrinths from which there was no way out.

There were many catastrophes in the thousand-year history of Russia, but after 1917, national tragedies followed a bloody series one after another.

The tragedy of the Civil War, the tragedy of collectivization, the tragedy of the Great Permanent Terror and, finally, the tragedy of June 22, 1941, which turned into a terrible tragedy of total war, unprecedented in cruelty and victims. Each of these catastrophes devoured millions of people, crushed the economy, crippled the souls of those who miraculously survived, preventing the country from escaping from the poisonous biosphere of the darkest Middle Ages, into which the Bolshevik leaders forcibly pushed it.

The catastrophe of 1941 is inextricably linked with the name of the main inspirer and developer of Operation Thunderstorm, obsessed with the obsessive idea of world domination by the great leader of all peoples, Comrade Stalin.

The greatness of Stalin lies precisely in the fact that he was a true master of Death. All his deeds are marked by hecatombs of victims. The exact number of victims of Stalin's rule is still controversial among historians: how many were killed and tortured: 30 million, 60 million, or more than 100 million during Stalin's 30 long years in power?

How could this happen?

Very simple.

A well-organized criminal group that called itself the "Bolshevik Party", taking advantage of the chaos in Russia, seized power in this country, and then behaved according to the classical canons of the underworld, drawing into its affairs the declassed sections of society that were most susceptible to robbery appeals and physically destroying the rest.

Through massacres (softly referred to in official history as "repressions") and artificially created famine, they managed to consolidate their power in Russia, turning it into a huge military prison camp.

The army, prisoners, workers on the ground and forging weapons - slaves from a laborer to a marshal - this is the social section of an ordinary mafia clan, swollen to an incredible size.

The once great country of Russia has been turned into a huge criminal gang. Next in line was a similar transformation of the rest of the world. Which was completely hidden.

Having provoked the Second World War, Stalin was waiting for the very opportunity that Lenin still dreamed of ...

The situation of 1941 turned out to be exactly the very opportunity.

There was only one real power left in Europe - Germany. According to Marxist-Leninist predictions, the "imperialist predators" squabbled among themselves and almost, in Moscow's opinion, destroyed each other.

The German army was ridiculously weaker than Stalin's. In addition, Germany did not have a raw material base for waging a long war and so far fought only at the expense of generous supplies from the USSR, thoughtlessly creating the military and political situation in Europe that Stalin needed. Aimed at the "blitzkrieg", the German army could not withstand the Stalinist blow. It would have become fatal for her, and the Red Army would have come to Berlin not in 1945, but in 1941.

And further in front of it, to the very ocean, would not be the powerful armies of the allies, but Europe would lie defenseless and, moreover, thirsty for liberation. All plans were thwarted by Hitler with his attack on June 22.

"What a song you ruined, fool!" - you can say about this in the words of one of Gorky's heroes. By attacking the Soviet Union, Hitler only managed to delay his own death, but he thwarted the most grandiose campaign of conquest since the time of Alexander the Great.

It would seem that the country allowed Stalin to turn itself into a "depot of the world proletariat", hoping that this would be achieved with "little bloodshed". Well, it's better to have "little blood" on someone else's territory than oceans of blood on your own under the knives of security officer butchers.

However, the leader turned out to be so illiterate in the field of international politics, which he so loved to deal with alone, that he was actually beaten with a thimble.

The country and people have paid a terrible new price for the bloodthirstiness of their father and teacher. The price was terrible, but maybe human civilization survived only because two bloody dictators, raised by similar misanthropic ideas of Bolshevism and Nazism, grappled with each other, and did not stand shoulder to shoulder. And this could well happen, because in essence, the history of the relationship between Hitler and Stalin is a tragic love story. Love, which was terrible to admit, but strong and sensual.

Both regimes were dead-end offshoots of the progressive movement of human civilization, and, implicitly understanding this, they loved each other, afraid to admit it, as two species equally doomed to degeneration love each other. And there is some higher mystical meaning in the fact that it was they who put so much effort into destroying each other. And their love, as one would expect, gave birth to a common offspring: red-browns who equally honor both unfortunate leaders who believed that they made history, although history was made by them, but neither of them understood this.

Hitler's Reich, against which the might of the united nations was turned, collapsed and ceased to exist. And in the way of Comrade Stalin stood the fifteen-million-strong American army, armed, among other things, with atomic weapons, which neither Hitler nor Stalin, despite all

your genius...

This army stood as a cordon sanitaire on the path of further communist expansion, and while the Soviet Union furiously continued to forge hundreds of thousands of tanks and aircraft, mountains of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons, world civilization, which had gone far ahead, developed fundamentally new means of crushing and finally buried the operation "Thunderstorm" under the rubble of the collapsed Stalinist empire.

March 12, 1995

INTRODUCTION

The idea of world domination is as old as time. The desire to achieve military and economic hegemony over the world arose in more than one violent head during the existence of our civilization. Alexander and Caesar, caliphs and Napoleon - this is not a complete list of those who tried to theoretically substantiate and practically implement the alluring idea of world domination.

Let's not disturb their shadows and move straight to the 20th century, when powerful empires, which, it would seem, only had to make a tiny effort before achieving full world hegemony, burst and collapsed from an excess of imperial ambitions. Moreover, they fell apart so quickly that no one, as they say, had time to gasp.

Russia collapsed first. It was a shame that it fell apart - on the eve of a carefully planned, well-prepared, coordinated with the allies military campaign, which, by all indications, was supposed to bring the war to a victorious end. But the thousand-year-old empire of military tension could not stand it and collapsed at the very moment when it considered itself stronger than ever.

The second collapsed Germany. Doubly insulting, because the German troops were in the West a hundred miles from Paris, and in the East - a hundred miles from St. Petersburg, occupying the vast expanses of European Russia and a good half of France. But the hard noose of the English blockade caught my throat. The forces were still there, but there was nothing to breathe.

Then the dominoes began. With a bang and a roar, the ancient Habsburg empire collapsed. Behind it collapsed the majestic Ottoman Empire - the Brilliant Porta - with difficulty holding the precious straits in the weakening hands. For centuries, Habsburgs and sultans have dealt with each other in countless wars, and collapsed together, for once ending up in a military

union.

But the English Empire survived, and not only survived, but, at first glance, became even more powerful, adding to itself the vast colonial possessions taken from the Germans and Turks. Wild envy, quickly growing into a terrible hatred, suppressed all other feelings for England on the part of the affected powers.

Spat upon and humiliated lay defeated Germany, having lost not only Alsace and Lorraine, but also the Ruhr region. All the colonies were taken away from her, and moreover - in order to completely humiliate - the vengeful British, as one of the conditions for surrender, demanded that they surrender to them in full force the pride of Germany - its fleet of the high seas - a fleet that, if not won the Jutland battle with the monstrous Grand Fleet English, then, in any case, gave the British a reason to reflect on their invincibility at sea.

This is probably why the surrender ceremony of the German fleet was arranged in the most humiliating way, resulting in the tragedy of Scapa Flow.

Hysteria of humiliation sweeps through crushed Germany. In a Bavarian hospital, the gassed corporal of the first company of the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, Adolf Hitler, who was twice wounded in battles with the British on Ypres and the Somme, was beaten against the iron bars of a soldier's bed, and was awarded two Iron Crosses for courage [1]. The humiliation of the Motherland, like ticks, tore the heart of a twenty-eight-year-old soldier, but to no lesser extent put pressure on his thinking and the ghost of Scapa Flow, reminding, warning, drowning out his fierce hatred for England, forcing him to reckon with reality in the whirlpool of manic ambitions.

The war threw Germany into the dustbin of history. The once brilliant Deutschemark has turned to dust. Factories stopped, millions of unemployed and beggars, terrible social tensions, the payment of war reparations, famine, riots, the polarization of society around extremely radical parties, empty store shelves - can all this be compared with a country prospering just four years ago? There is no work, and there is no incentive to work, so people spend all their time at rallies, where the newly-minted "people's leaders" offer their recipes for leading Germany out of the deepest political and economic crisis.

But what kind of news comes from the east - from Russia? Some international gang of adventurers has seized power there and openly proclaims the idea of world domination, served under the sauce of "world proletarian revolution". Their agents are already disturbing Germany. No, it's not for him. Too many Jews. Disgusting. He hates the Jews almost as much as he hates the British, holding them responsible for Germany's downfall. But... How magnificent is the idea of creating

party state on the basis of an ideological party. A party bound by iron discipline, conspiratorial like the Jesuit order, led by an iron leader who relies on a merciless punitive apparatus subordinate to him. How beautiful

the idea of outlawing certain groups of the population in the name of consolidation around the party and the awe of the rest! It is only necessary to replace this "Jewish internationalism" with "German nationalism" and to earn some money in detail, without repeating the heap of mistakes that have already been made in Russia ...

Russia... It was disintegrating before our eyes. The multi-million army fled to their homes. In the chaos of the rapid whirlpool of all-destroying anarchy, the royal throne disappeared - as it was not. Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Finland, the republics of Transcaucasia, the khanates and emirates of Central Asia declared their independence. A good half of Siberia fell off the empire with a bang. All the Cossacks declared their unwillingness to deal with Moscow.

territory from the Don to the Ussuri.

However, a group of fanatics and adventurers who seized power in the country did not lose their heads at the sight of a terrible collapse. Moreover, with incredible courage, bordering, as it seemed to many, on suicidal recklessness, the Bolsheviks declared their goal "a world revolution", "the creation of a world proletarian government" with

total physical destruction

all , "who is not with us."

Russia was declared the "depot of the world revolution". They put forward the slogan of the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class without any clear formulation of who should be considered a bourgeois - yes, anyone! The system of war communism was involved in the country, in comparison with which even the pure socialism of Plato could seem like a biblical Eden.

Loud propaganda pressed on the ears and brains. The system of concentration camps was developed. "World Revolution!" - repeated in countless speeches the great practitioner of international socialism, a fanatic of his idea, who unconditionally believed in the slogans put forward by him and, like anyone overwhelmed by fanatical faith, makes him believe in them the rest.

The unverified, hastily analyzed propositions that he uttered fell on the world like heavy axioms, instantly acquiring the irrefutability of physical laws: "Imperialism is the last decaying stage of capitalism", "The inevitability of wars in the era of imperialism", "The inevitability of world revolution". He intimidates his supporters: "If there is no world revolution in the next 10-15 years, we will perish!" There are no more sovereign states, but there is a "bourgeoisie organized into states", and the bourgeoisie, as you know, must be destroyed! "Use executions more widely," he teaches. From the suspension of terror, all the great revolutions of the past perished or degenerated.

Palaces are on fire, ancient temples are blown up, national values are stolen, national shrines and traditions are trampled into the mud and blood, the color of the nation flees with horror from the distraught country, the rest turn into hostages, every minute waiting for the executioner's bullets.

The entire population of the country becomes hostages. In secret directives and instructions, the words "Complete, total extermination..." are almost stamped out. The fire of the civil war is still raging, and the war with Poland is already flaring up. "The moment has come," Lenin rejoices, "to probe Europe with a bayonet!" Poland is just a bridge to Europe. Forward to the aid of the European proletariat! "You," Lenin addresses the Komsomol members leaving for the Polish front, "in 10-15 years you will live in a communist society!"

The crushing defeat near Warsaw, almost coinciding in time with the thunder of the twelve-inch guns of Kronstadt, finally makes us wake up from the frenzy of battle. For the first time since 1917, a candidate for the leadership of the world proletariat looks around in fear.

Blooming only seven years ago, the Russian Empire lies in smoking, bloody ruins. Trade and crafts are destroyed. Not only the young Russian industry was destroyed, but also the ancient Russian bread. The three hundred thousandth army of "warriors-internationalists", made up of former German and Austrian prisoners of war, Latvians, Chinese and Jews, is rolling around the country like a steamroller, destroying the "petty-bourgeois elements" - that is, peasants who do not want to turn into serfs again. The peasants respond with mass uprisings. They are jammed with artillery, doused with mustard gas, strangled with war gases. Some

no one has been sowing or plowing for years. A famine unseen since the Time of Troubles strikes a dying country.

Railways were destroyed, the military and merchant fleet were almost completely destroyed. Foreign trade, as well as domestic, is reduced to zero. The hard Russian ruble - the pride of Russian economists - simply evaporated. Commodity-money relations are terminated. The once majestic Orthodox Church is silent and does not even pray. A broken and crucified country lies in shit and blood. She will rise again, but it will no longer be Russia, but something terrible - a revived corpse, a monster like Frankenstein.

Perhaps this is how it was intended, but the great leader of the world proletariat, somewhat confused and disappointed, since none of his categorical prophecies came true, is out of the game, struck by a stroke. And soon he dies, dictating his famous last letters to stenographers before his death, from which it follows that the only way out of the deadly impasse into which he has led the country is to return back to European-type capitalism.

Then why was everything done?.. But what about world domination, the idea of which had already captured his students? What to do with the Comintern? What will happen to the already overgrown and overfed party bureaucracy and the huge merciless punitive apparatus?

A small pockmarked man with a black mustache in a semi-military tunic and breeches tucked into high boots, standing over Lenin's coffin, takes an oath to continue the work of the leader. "We swear to you, Comrade Lenin..."

His whole appearance contrasts sharply with the appearance of other associates of the late leader, dressed in three-piece suits and ties. After all, Lenin himself constantly dressed like this, and the leader's lifestyle is the lifestyle of the era! Gleaming pince-nez glasses on shtetl noses, barely hiding ironic smiles, they listen to how the pockmarked mustachioed man reads his oath with a strong Caucasian accent. "We swear to you, Comrade Lenin..."

Lenin did not like him for his rudeness and lack of education, and they - his comrades-in-arms and students - simply despised this "half-educated seminarian" with a dark past - "godfather from raspberries", with criminal manners, combined with the capriciousness of a movie star and the vindictive rancor of a wild mountaineer. They temporarily pushed him forward at Lenin's deathbed in order to continue a furious squabble over Lenin's ideological legacy behind his sham back... But their time has already passed. They will shout a little more about the "permanent revolution", about the "world proletariat" and about the "inevitable collapse of capitalism", and then everyone will get their own bullet in the back of the head.

Joseph Stalin, the son of a drunken shoemaker from the Georgian town of Gori, reduced all his pre-revolutionary activities to the so-called "practical Marxism", organizing bandit attacks on banks, cash collectors, mail trains and even steamboats in order to provide money for those living in exile and unable to earn money. a penny with their labor of the leaders of the "proletarian" revolution.

In between "exes," as Vladimir Ilyich lovingly called his work, Iosif Dzhughashvili was in prison or in exile, communicating with professional criminals, police provocateurs and lumpens of all kinds. He did not hone his oratorical skills and intellect in Swiss-Danish-Swedish cafeterias in endless disputes with the degrading European social democracy.

Stalin saw the terrible confusion and stunnedness of Ilyich after the suppression of the revolution in Hungary and after the Kronstadt rebellion. He saw with what cowardly haste the leader gave the signal for a general retreat, called the NEP, hypocritically refusing everything that he passionately talked about a few days ago, in particular, from

the foundations of the foundations of their doctrine - the achievement of world domination through the world proletarian revolution.

Several times Lenin reassured his comrades that next week he would begin to finish off the NEP, and they were already sharpening their knives, but at the next party conference they heard from the leader that "NEP is serious and for a long time!"

Such unprincipled maneuvering, these shirks now to the right, now to the left, irritated and showed that, it seems, the leader no longer corresponds to his lofty mission. It was then that Ilyich had his first stroke, which very quickly led first to a search in his personal Kremlin office, and then to death ...

And then Lenin died. But his work lives on. It must live! Who dared to say, who even dared to think that Lenin was wrong?! Everything that Ilyich predicted is true. He just slightly miscalculated the time, slightly underestimated the degree of the bourgeoisization of the Western proletariat. Let everyone who doubts, who dares to doubt, look at the world.

The crisis and the deepest economic depression have engulfed all the countries of capitalism. Here it is, that very "last, decaying stage"! Powerful strikes, crowds of millions of unemployed, stopped factories, a series of terrible bankruptcies of seemingly indestructible firms, panic on the stock exchanges, confused faces of Western politicians.

The capitalist world is convulsing and agonizing, but Stalin is not yet able to actively engage in events. The citizen of the Land of the Soviets still drags out a miserable existence, the evil white emigrants shed crocodile tears for the ruined people, and the unemployed of agonizing capitalism do not even think about the proletarian revolution. Nothing, we will bring liberation to the peoples of the world on bayonets!

First, a modern army should be created, and in order to create it, the industrialization of the country is necessary. Secondly, it is necessary to discipline the country, and Lenin also taught that for this it is necessary to outlaw some part of the population. Then they announced the bourgeois - it was brilliant. Who to announce now? Socialism cannot be built, Lenin repeatedly emphasized, without putting an end to the "petty-bourgeois element," that is, in human language, to the independence of the peasants. This is where we must start, relying on the following prophecy "about the inevitability of wars in the era of imperialism." In the meantime, let the Western world calm down - we still need to get money from it for our industrialization!

And while the bawlers from Lenin's entourage continued to yell about the world revolution - Stalin puts forward the slogan of building socialism in one single country, "referring, without batting an eyelid, again to Lenin, who just always claimed the opposite.

From such a heretical interpretation of the great doctrine, from the incredible impudence with which the new slogan was presented, which determined the general line of the party, the breath of the entire "old Bolshevik guard" was taken away. But Stalin knew what he was doing.

The crushed, exhausted people were deaf to the slogans of world domination. Ten years of uninterrupted and unprecedented in their bitterness wars not only changed the soul of the people, their anthropological type also changed. The old, humane and naive Russian intelligentsia almost completely disappeared, and one of its miraculously surviving luminaries proclaimed to the whole quivering world: "If the enemy does not surrender, he is destroyed!". The famous Russian industrial proletariat was completely exterminated and disappeared from the face of the earth, and the collectivization that hit the countryside forced the peasants driven out of the land to go to the factories and construction sites of the first five-year plan, giving the authorities material for any kind of processing.

The campaign against the kulaks, which destroyed 15 million people, as Stalin had foreseen, consolidated society, if what existed in the country can be called society. The crackling campaign to "eliminate the kulaks as a class" silenced the volleys in the basements of the OGPU, where the last dreamers of a world proletarian revolution were sent to the other world, who did not understand or did not want to understand the new tactics of the moment.

All this is well known, but somehow receded into the background, that in volleys and blood

The second civil war saw , as Stalin himself called the collectivization carried out by him, processes that eluded the attention of the world of that time and of today's historians. And the following happened:

an army of unprecedented scale and technical equipment was created and deployed. The work on the militarization of the country carried out by Stalin from the moment he, having completed collectivization, concentrated in his hands all the fullness of state and party power in 1934, staggers the imagination as one of the wonders of the world.

In fact, let us recall that the basis of the population of the USSR in the early and mid-1930s was the multi-million mass of the peasantry, for the most part absolutely illiterate, who saw only two mechanisms in their life - an ax and a plow. This mass could easily, of course, be mobilized, put on a horse, taught to shoot from a Mosin rifle or turn the steering wheel of a warship. But something else was needed. It was necessary, firstly, to create personnel for the air force. Not elite cadres of pilots of the First World War from hussars, cavalry guards and naval officers who studied piloting at their own expense, but hundreds of thousands of pilots, navigators, radio operators, aircraft engineers, technicians, repairmen, gunsmiths. It was necessary to create highly qualified engineering, technical and working personnel for the aviation industry. And to create all this from the wild and primitive peasant masses.

And this is not even the main thing - but the fact that

all this was created in less than five years!

But that's just aviation. And the tanks? Tens of thousands of tanks required more than one hundred thousand specialists in a wide variety of fields, up to specialists in profile vulcanization for diesel gaskets. And they all appeared in five years! But they all still needed to be taught to read and write before that!

Next is the fleet! The most complex type of armed forces, requiring powerful technical knowledge from the personnel.

More than two hundred submarines - more than all the maritime powers combined - were built from 1933 to 1940, and each boat had two trained crews. They didn't grow on trees! But then where did they come from?

What an incredible gigantic work has been done! Let us recall that if by some miracle a few tsarist generals and colonels survived at the top, then there was no one left at the middle and lower levels of military administration - all lieutenants, captains, captains were killed to a single man or fled abroad, and if they risked returning, how in 1925, they were shot on the spot. There was nothing left of the old legacy - everything was created anew, as if by magic.

The footage of the civil war was not suitable for the new army either. Firstly, because they were completely illiterate, and secondly, and most importantly, they were created by Trotsky and, not without reason, were considered Trotskyist. And therefore, they were treated no less harshly than with the former tsarist officers: everyone from Dumenko and Mironov to the elderly Shorin was

ruthlessly liquidated.

Why was an unimaginably huge army created with such haste, hundreds of times exceeding all the limits of necessary state defense, if even Stalin himself in his numerous speeches noted the growing pacifism in Europe, torn by contradictions, shaken by crises and practically unarmed? Recall the numbers: the army of France - 300 thousand, including colonial formations; Reichswehr - 150 thousand and not a single tank, not even an armored car; USA - 140 thousand and a company (experimental) of armored vehicles; England - 90 thousand, scattered throughout the empire;

USSR - 2.5 million and already four tank corps.

At the tankodromes near Kazan, together with the secretly arrived officers of the Reichswehr, the tactics of tank wedges are being worked out. Thirsty for revenge, the Germans are a natural ally in the future campaign.

A huge army of many millions, "sparkling with the brilliance of steel", is frankly preparing for a "furious campaign." A thunderous roar is heard from millions of throats: "Long live the great Stalin!"

But Stalin hesitates. Why?

England! Damned England, still ruling the world with the help of imposed international alliances, with the help of carefully woven nooses of the international financial system, with the help of her global empire on five continents and a monstrous fleet! What is the use of this decayed Europe if the British Empire survives! Stalin hates England both because she is the foremother of all the democracies he hates, and because for centuries she skillfully forced Russia to "pull chestnuts out of the fire for herself", but - and this is the main thing - because this accursed empire is the last a bulwark stood in the way of the world proletarian revolution, and how to crush it, he knows.

Soviet agents, who all over the world feel better than at home, are instantly rounded up in England and expelled in disgrace.

In deep silence, Stalin watches in his personal cinema the chronicle of the Battle of Jutland. Looks almost every week, causing surprise of his "colleagues" in the Politburo. Long columns of English and German dreadnoughts leaving the horizon, clouds of smoke from hundreds of pipes, battle flags curling on the palisade of masts. Volleys of heavy guns. Here one of the English dreadnoughts took off into the air, here in clouds of fire, smoke and coal dust it broke in half and sinks the second, here, blazing, falls on board under a whirlwind of German shells, the fourth is on fire !!! Defeat of the British? Unfortunately no...

Like any person who grew up in Russia, survived the Tsushima disaster, Stalin suffered from a naval inferiority complex. Admiral Mahan's volume in his library was riddled with exclamation and question marks, just like Kaiser Wilhelm's. The fact that Mahan made an indelible impression on the leader is already evidenced by the fact that Mahan's theory of dominance at sea was immediately, as soon as Stalin became acquainted with it, declared bourgeois and pseudoscientific, and its supporters were shot or imprisoned. However, the program for the construction of 16 battleships of the "Soviet Union" type was already approved at the personal insistence of Stalin!

What to do? We need to look into the "bible" left by Lenin. It clearly states the inevitability of wars in the era of imperialism. We must wait until England is drawn into some kind of military adventure. But with whom? With the United States? Does not look like it. With Japan? Even before the revolution, Lenin predicted war between Japan and the United

states. England may also be drawn into such a war, but it remains to be seen which side is on which side. "There are no eternal friends, but only eternal interests!" The imperialist predators have no morals. This is what Lenin taught, and this must always be remembered!

While Stalin was torn apart by internal contradictions and inferiority complexes, constantly forcing him to "check his life according to Lenin", the former corporal of the first company of the 16th Bavarian infantry regiment became the chancellor of Germany as the Fuhrer (leader) of the party that won the elections to the Reichstag.

The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) organized by him, enriched by the experience of the sixteen-year existence of a party state in the East, came to power in a much more organized way, clearly not wanting to plunge their country into Russian chaos. The party punitive apparatus was already ready, but the old one was not destroyed, but peacefully connected with the new one.

Having come to power under the slogan of the revival of Germany and the complete rejection of the articles of the Versailles Treaty, which Churchill himself called "idiotic", Adolf Hitler also chose a victim to consolidate around himself the entire German people, but not the bourgeoisie or peasants, as his teachers in the East (Hitler believed these measures are erroneous), and the Jews of Germany, whom he first declared outlaws by a special act. The Nazi anti-Jewish campaign was simply copied from the anti-kulak campaign in the USSR, with the only difference being that anyone in the USSR could be declared a kulak or a kulakist, while in Germany everything was immediately put into order so as not to give free rein to the base instincts of the population - here it's either you are a Jew, or not a Jew - how lucky to be born.

It should be noted that Stalin, to put it mildly, could not stand the Jews, but was afraid, knowing perfectly well the old criminal, who had been stewing in the Russian revolutionary underground for so many years, that it was not safe to get involved with such a formidable opponent.

Hitler, being as poorly educated as Stalin, did not, however, have the rich life experience and oriental cunning of Joseph Vissarionovich. No one warned him against such a reckless, largely provoked step.

Unlike Stalin, Hitler did not suffer from complexes and indecision. He liked to take risks and did not spend much time thinking about his foreign policy moves. Not having time to take the chancellor's chair, he immediately unilaterally denounced the Treaty of Versailles and ordered his troops to occupy the Ruhr region.

The step is more than risky. The Kremlin was on guard. Here it begins. But dormant on the laurels of the winner of the last war, France, decomposed by the socialists, limited itself to a sluggish protest, and in England, "His Majesty's Government" expressed "concern and regret" about this.

The pipes of the Ruhr began to smoke again, the stopped heart of Germany beat "in a joyful rhythm", dissolving unemployment and other insoluble problems of the Weimar Republic. Hitler officially announced the German rearmament program without any restrictions.

Gaining strength, the Wehrmacht is marching across the country. Pilots and tankers who have completed practice in Lipetsk and Kazan are quickly putting rearmament programs on a grand scale. From millions of throats, a thunderous, jubilant cry is heard: "Heil, Hitler!" Lead us, leader! Anschluss of Austria. The alarmed Entente countries are trying to negotiate a new alliance. Stalin rubs his hands. In the wake of a new danger, the USSR is quickly recognized by almost all European countries, again ready to fight "to the last Russian soldier."

So, in the two largest countries of Europe, on the wave of humiliation and the collapse of imperial ambitions during the First World War, two monstrous regimes arose, which, no matter how they masked their goals, and they did not particularly hide their goals, began to achieve what they failed to achieve. unlucky predecessors - Emperor Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm.

In one of these countries, the revival of the old imperial spirit took place on the basis of international socialism with a frank ambition for world domination, if not yet actual, but at least spiritual. "If the Third Rome didn't work out, then at least let the Third International work out," the cynics from Lenin's entourage quipped. In the Byzantine games of the struggle for personal power, Stalin, putting forward the slogan "building socialism in one country", frankly translated the ideology of Bolshevism into the mainstream of National Socialism, although the multinational specifics of the USSR did not allow him to embody the simplified Hitler formula: "One country, one people, one leader ! Temporarily pushing into the background the idea of a world revolution inherited from Lenin, but sincerely believing in the global prophecies of Ilyich, Stalin patiently waited for signs of the fulfillment of these prophecies in order to capture the whole world under the pretext of international assistance to class brothers and the crushing of "world capitalism".

The Hitler regime arose on the foundations of National Socialism, but the program of the National Socialist [2] Party quickly dispelled any doubt that Hitler would embody it within the borders of Germany in 1914. Both parties - both in Moscow and in Berlin - considered themselves "workers", proclaimed their decisions on behalf of the working people, masterfully juggling the concept of "people" [3].

The emergence in such a small "range" as Europe, of two huge predators of actually the same family and only slightly different in appearance, easily made it clear to everyone who closely followed the development of events that before starting to fulfill their global plans, they would have to figure it out together. The impudent plagiarist from Berlin caused legitimate irritation in Moscow. Having stolen and slightly reshaped the ideology born by the eastern neighbor, he impudently tried to pass it off as his own invention, interfering with work and frustrating Moscow's plans. Naturally, it must be destroyed. Destroyed, yes! But with the maximum benefit for socialism. Stalin did not like to take risks. Everything he did, he did thoroughly. He still had time—at least he thought so.

Unlike Stalin, Hitler believed that he had no time.

Splashing with saliva and waving weapons, he screams heart-rendingly about the need to destroy Bolshevism, about the "Lebensraum" in the vastness of Russia. Puffing on his pipe, Stalin watches through a cloud of tobacco smoke, hiding his ax in his bosom and waiting for his emotional opponent, in his next unpredictable jump, to turn his back on him in order to drive the ax into the back of his head.

Both are well aware that a fight is inevitable. One of them must be destroyed. Both also understand that this is a tactical task, since the true tasks are much broader. Getting in the way and tangled under each other's feet, testing each other at every opportunity, say, in Spain, in Yugoslavia, at Khalkhin Gol - they do not forget that their main enemy, the main obstacle on the way to the "world revolution" is England . England is "a Jewish plutocratic empire, it is an instrument of Jewish robbery, with which the Jews are trying to suck the last blood out of the population of the world, including the English

people".

In the personal cinema of the Fuhrer, like his opponent, the chronicle of the Battle of Jutland is constantly played. Hitler looks emotionally. When the Queen Mary explodes, she hits her knees with her palms, jumps up, squeals with delight. Taking Grand Admiral Raeder by the arm, he excitedly proves to him that "if we had two more battlecruisers and the battle would start two hours earlier," then the British would be defeated. The Grand Admiral, himself a participant in the Battle of Jutland, listens to the Fuhrer, respectfully bowing his impeccable parting, hiding a grin on his aristocratic face.

However, the Grand Admiral agrees with the Führer, emphasizing that it is possible to crush England only if the Plan Z, which he recently submitted to the Führer for approval, is a program for building twenty battleships capable of defeating the hated Grand Fleet. According to all calculations, the program cannot be completed before 1943, and therefore ... Hitler understands everything, he gives Raeder his word that the war with England will begin no earlier than 1943. Until then, there's plenty to do!

British intelligence, with anxious curiosity watching the fight between the great leaders, unexpectedly received interesting information from Moscow. This information came from three independent sources at once, which moved it from the category of probable to the category of very plausible. The report said (August 1938) that Stalin had begun menopause. The sources of information were: Vera Davydova, the leader's mistress known throughout Moscow, his "passion" Evgeny Yezhov, and someone from the leader's close circle, who naturally wished to remain anonymous [4]. Deep psychologists from the world's oldest intelligence made the right conclusions from the information received: great politicians will appear in a short interval between the onset of menopause and the onset of insanity. In any case, in the next 3-4 years, some diabolical combination can be expected from Stalin.

Knowing the mental imbalance of his Berlin understudy, Stalin does not leave him alone for a minute. Defiantly presenting the Jew Litvinov as the mouthpiece of his foreign policy, Stalin infuriates the Fuhrer with his ideas of creating collective security in Europe, clearly making it clear to the "arrogant plagiarist" that he, Stalin, lifts a finger, and the iron ring of the old Entente closes again on Hitler's throat and the fate of Kaiser Wilhelm will inevitably await him.

Hitler runs furiously around his office, cutting out the last words of this "dirty Jewish lackey in the Kremlin." He strikes a blow at Stalin by organizing the "Tukhachevsky case", not suspecting that all the documents necessary for this were planted to him by Stalin himself.

Stalin, with apparent pleasure, plays on the sensitive strings of European politics. His idea of collective security excites the public opinion of England and France, but Stalin, knowing full well that he is feared no less than Hitler, masterfully bluffs, arranging his proposals with conditions that are impossible in advance for the passage of the Red Army through the territories of Poland, then Czechoslovakia, then Romania. From these proposals, a cold chill runs through the hunted countries of the Eastern European buffer.

Yes, and England and France look with fear at what is happening in the Stalinist empire. Constantly "checking life according to Lenin", Stalin does not stop terror for a minute. Lenin constantly urged "to substantiate and legitimize it (terror) in principle, clearly, without falsehood and without embellishment." Following the behest of the great teacher, Stalin turned terror into the norm of the state life of the USSR.

Unleashed from the chain, the NKVD with particular frenzy clung to its eternal rival -

army, having cleaned it, in the apt expression of Klim Voroshilov, "to the white bones", placing three out of five marshals against the wall, almost all commanders, commanders and commanders, as well as a good half of the regiment commanders.

Even Stalin himself is puzzled. The big purge he conceived before the big war pretty much messed up the firewood. Of course, it was necessary to liquidate these clever marshals from half-cut lieutenants, all this military monarchist-Black-Hundred trash that had dug in in academic departments and district headquarters, all the poisonous Trotskyist foam, unbearably stinking since the civil war, overflowing the party apparatus and the state security apparatus.

Lenin somehow blurted out in a fit of frankness: "All our plans are shit. The main thing is the selection of personnel! And he was absolutely right. "Cadres decide everything!" - Stalin paraphrased his teacher and subordinated all his actions to the correct implementation of this ingenious testament. The multi-million army of the Gulag, armed with crowbars, picks, shovels, saws and wheelbarrows, was supposed to lay the foundation of a socialist economy. Another, much smaller, army of "convicts" with slide rulers, arithmometers and drawing boards, moved socialist science. The third, whose soldiers considered themselves free, was supposed to guard the first two. The fourth army, called the Red Army, guarded the "peaceful labor" of the three previous ones, waiting for a call for help from the world proletariat. The huge party apparatus and apparatus of the NKVD had to oversee all these armies, protecting them from harmful thoughts and constantly moving personnel from one army to another. And above all this not particularly complex structure towered the figure of the leader. This is how socialism was understood even by ancient thinkers - not like us: the elite, the guards, the slaves. The guard is between the elite and the slaves. A bad guard goes into slavery, a good guard goes into the elite. "Neither this nor that" - dies at a military post. Any member of the elite can wake up in the morning as a slave or a guard, a slave has the opportunity to break into the guards, but never into the elite! The most important thing here is the correct selection of personnel for the elite and the choice of myths for the education of guards and slaves. This was emphasized by the old man Plato!

"It is necessary," Stalin instructed his new favorite Malenkov, "to completely renew the party-state mechanism in order to prepare the country for a big war."

While the former NKVD Commissar Nikolai Yezhov was being beaten in mortal combat in the Sukhanov prison, crushing his arms and legs, but actually not asking any questions, Stalin and the top military leaders, sullenly sucking on their phone, looked through the lists of army and navy officers sent to the Gulag, marking with red and blue crosses subject to release. Not all, of course, but a good third! But such trust was given to Yezhov! Indeed, a helpful fool is more dangerous than an enemy. He was told

clean up the army, and he almost destroyed it. It would be interesting to find out who he worked for. However, this is not so important. But he needs to realize his guilt, and therefore he must die not simply, but with awareness of guilt, i.e. slowly.

Stalin personally paints the ritual of the execution of Yezhov, and not eternally drunk performers from the Lubyanka are involved in its execution, but two refined specialists from the apparatus of the "Administration of the Affairs of the Central Committee", who recently demonstrated their skill during the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky.

Chapter 1

Damn internal affairs do not give Stalin the opportunity to focus on the main

problem - the preparation of the march to Europe. But this march is impossible until the country is in order, which is ideal for the implementation of his plan - to leave as few people as possible who are not included in any armies. They simply shouldn't be. But that's easier said than done! It is a cosmic task to arrange "cadres" correctly when it comes to almost two hundred million, but Stalin considers it completely solvable if the whole complex of "political and organizational measures" outlined by him is carried out.

He himself determines the annual figures for the Gulag, which, constantly increasing, reach their peak not in 1936, as many believe, but in 1940 and 1941, which once again confirms the unearthly wisdom of the leader.

The Spanish Civil War shows that the resurgent Wehrmacht is still pissing in diapers - its tanks and planes can only cause a condescending smile, and the tactics of their use - a shrug. Nothing prevents Stalin from shooting in Spain everyone he needs and stealing the country's gold reserves.

A Soviet plane planted a bomb on the German battleship Deutschland, which was darting off the Spanish coast. At the same time, 23 German sailors die, and their funeral in Germany causes an explosion of anti-Russian emotions, comparable only to August 1914. "Still, this Stalin is a brilliant guy!" - completely unexpectedly bursts out of Hitler, puzzling his gang. But the Fuhrer explains that only a great leader can carry out such magnificent activities in his own country and abroad.

Hitler himself managed to restore the order he needed in his own country much faster. This is understandable, given the organization of the population and the size of the territory of Germany. The stormy dynamics of the start leads Hitler further - to the Sudetenland crisis. The integrity of the young Czechoslovak Republic is guaranteed by the victorious countries of the First World War. The European crisis begins.

Public opinion puts pressure on the governments of England and France not to mess with Hitler - let him take his Sudetenland. Continuing to unnerve Hitler, Stalin, who has been cleverly pushed aside from participating in European affairs, again proposes measures "for collective security." But England and France do not want to mess with one bandit to stop another. Stalin addresses Czechoslovakia with a proposal to bring the Red Army into its territory. Beneš and Gakha shied away in horror from the outstretched hand of the Moscow dictator. As a result, after Munich, the Sudetenland goes to Hitler without a single shot being fired. The cowardly Czechoslovak army, which is significantly superior to the Wehrmacht in terms of technical equipment and combat training, confirms the German opinion about the Czechs as "a solid gang of simulators."

Hitler, in the heat of excitement, quickly plans the next victim - Poland, considering his hands completely untied. He is wrong, but sincerely wrong. England is not going to forgive him Munich and together with France announces guarantees to Poland. In an interview with the American newspaper The New York Herald Tribune, Hitler sneers at the British guarantees, calling them "a piece of paper that can only be used in a closet." At this time, Stalin offers his assistance to Poland on the condition that a limited contingent of Red Army units be brought into its territory. Ungrateful Poland responds to such a proposal by calling up reservists. Stalin, sucking on his pipe, disappears in clouds of tobacco smoke.

Meanwhile, Hitler sets the date for the invasion of Poland - approximately on August 26, 1939, announcing to his somewhat cowardly generals that only some postponement of the date is possible, but no later than September 1.

On February 12, 1939, the British Cabinet held a secret meeting. The meeting is attended by representatives of the British and French General Staffs. A detailed picture of Germany's capabilities is being studied.

The Reich economy is overstretched. The strategic raw materials will only be enough for a few months of waging a war. Hitler's fleet can be ignored for the time being. Positional warfare on the Continent behind the French Maginot line and a tight blockade from the sea would suffocate the Reich by January 1940 if Hitler went to war with Poland in August 1939.

The Cabinet adopts a resolution: if Hitler attacks Poland, England and France will declare war on him without hesitation. The French army and the British expeditionary forces hold back the Wehrmacht on land, without taking any active actions to minimize casualties, while the English fleet, with the possible support of the French, throws the good old noose of a naval blockade on Germany, from which there is not even a theoretical way out, other than surrender. As for the USSR, Stalin, standing knee-deep in the blood of his own people, is hardly capable of actively intervening in European affairs under such circumstances.

The Allies are mistaken, but sincerely mistaken. They still don't know Stalin very well. All the terror was started by him precisely in order to actively intervene in European affairs, in order to turn the USSR into a single military labor camp, bound by the most reliable, in Stalin's opinion, cement - fear. The Munich Agreement, which prevented the start of Stalin's long-awaited European War, caused him a surge of rage. Cursed cowards decomposed from luxury! But, unlike Hitler, he knows how to control himself.

On March 10, 1939, the leader delivers a report at the 18th Party Congress. As usual, he speaks in the "modern language" invented by Lenin, where peace is war, truth is a lie, love is hate, aggression is defense. As a rule, in such speeches it is immediately impossible to understand anything. But Stalin cannot contain his dissatisfaction and disappointment that the war in Europe, which he has been waiting for for almost 19 years, has not yet begun. He lashes out at England and France, calling them "war provocateurs" for keeping the European conflict from breaking out. Apparently, having forgotten what he was talking about just a minute ago, the leader, with unexpected frankness, begins to stigmatize the "non-intervention policy" of England and France, bluntly stating that such a policy poses almost the main threat to the interests of the Soviet Union.

While Stalin, with unusual passion for him, was making speeches, listening to the stormy applause of the mannequins sitting in the hall, in the midst of the congress, on March 15, Hitler captured the whole of Czechoslovakia, although under the Munich Agreement he was entitled only to the Sudetenland.

It became clear that Hitler could not be frightened. "Adolf bit the bit," American intelligence reported from Berlin in its usual manner. In European capitals, puffing, rubbing their sides intelligence services of almost all countries. Not a single decision, not a single event could be kept secret. Gray streams of information, adorned with bright ribbons of disinformation, coiled around the agitated Europe like rings of a giant serpent.

The British cabinet continued to probe the ground about the possibility of an Anglo-Soviet military alliance (for this purpose, Prime Minister Chamberlain himself visited the Soviet embassy in London on March 16), but no one wanted this alliance. On the contrary, a very elegant plan already existed - to pit the USSR and Germany against each other and thereby solve both European and world problems. The most correct way to do this, as indicated in the presented

the British intelligence memorandum to the government was to provoke a rapprochement between Germany and the USSR. "

If these countries come to any political, and even better - to a military agreement, then the war between them will become completely inevitable and will break out almost immediately after the signing of such an agreement.

US President Roosevelt came to the same conclusion when he received the first reports of the emerging Soviet-German rapprochement. "

If they (Hitler and Stalin) enter into an alliance, then with the same inevitability with which day changes night, a war will begin between them.

On March 21, the closing day of the 18th Congress, the British government proposed to Stalin that the USSR, Britain, France, and Poland adopt a declaration on joint resistance to Hitler's expansion in Europe. There was no answer. March 31 England and France announced guarantees to Poland. Stalin chuckled but said nothing. In response, Hitler declared the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement denounced. Taking advantage of the moment, Hitler also announced the termination of the German-Polish non-aggression pact, concluded in 1934.

April 6 Anglo-Polish agreement on mutual assistance in the event of German aggression is signed.

April 13 England and France provide guarantees for the security of Greece and Romania. The Soviet press is waging a mocking campaign against the "British guarantees", constantly reminding them of what they cost the gullible Czechoslovakia.

April 16 England and France send draft agreements on mutual assistance and support to the Soviet leadership in case, as a result of "the implementation of guarantees to Poland, the Western powers will be drawn into the war with Germany." But there is no specific answer. To the English, if they had any doubts about this at all, everything becomes clear. Stalin does not need any measures, pacts and guarantees capable of ensuring peace in Europe.

He needs a war, and he will do everything in his power to make it break out as soon as possible.

However, to Stalin's credit, it must be said that he did not particularly try to hide this. At the same 18th Congress, the head of the Main Political Directorate of the Workers 'and Peasants' Red Army, one of the leader's closest associates, Lev Mekhlis, to the thunderous applause of the audience howling with delight, clearly deciphered Stalin's thought: "If the second imperialist war turns its edge against the first socialist state in the world, then transfer military operations to the territory of the enemy, fulfill their international duties and

multiply the number of Soviet republics!"

Leading players leaned over the European chessboard, waiting for the next move. And he was not slow to follow. Stalin made a pawn move.

On May 3, 1939, a small message appeared on the last page of the Pravda newspaper in the Brief News section stating that the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M. Litvinov was dismissed from the post of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs at his own request due to his state of health. Comrade V.M. Molotov was appointed to the post of people's commissar, it was said in the same message. In the world this message has slammed the tocsin. Removed Litvinov - a supporter of collective security measures

against impudent Germany, a Jew whom Stalin specially kept at his post, demonstrating to Hitler the absolute impossibility of any official negotiations.

In Berlin, jubilation reigned. Finally, between Germany and the USSR, this, as Hitler irritably put it, "lousy Jew" ceased to stand! [5] Paris and London also got it right. Especially in London. Stalin made the first hint at the possibility of rapprochement with Hitler. Fine. They themselves will not notice how, in a fit of friendly embrace, they will begin to choke each other.

Serious attempts to conclude any agreement with the USSR are being stopped. There will also be, of course, Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, the frivolity of which will be obvious both to the contracting parties and practically to the whole world - with the main goal of angering Hitler.

And military drums, timpani and trumpets continue to rumble over Moscow. Even in his New Year's Address to the Soviet People, Stalin, in the Pravda newspaper of January 1, 1939, called on the Soviet Union to be ready to "defeat any enemy on its territory", putting into circulation a new military doctrine - "to beat the enemy with little blood on his territory". True, at the same time, according to the rules of "new speech", it was necessary to add, as in a spell, the magic words "if the USSR is attacked."

How much this preamble meant nothing was shown by subsequent events, full of gross provocations, shelling of one's own troops, cries of fraternal, international and other assistance, menacingly swaggering ultimatums, unconditional notes, etc.

Stalin was certainly an amazing person. Until recently, he publicly sharply criticized the theory of the so-called "blitzkrieg" (lightning war), calling it "a product of the bourgeois fear of the proletarian revolution", and no one has yet had time to gasp from the awareness of the great wisdom of the leader, like Stalin, translating the understandable expression "blitzkrieg" to "new speech", formulated, as it seemed to everyone, his own military doctrine - "with little blood on foreign territory". What is this if not the same "blitzkrieg"?

"A crushing blow to enemy territory" began its march across the country. This was discussed on January 21 at a solemn meeting on the occasion of the anniversary of Lenin's death, at which those sitting in the hall had the pleasure of seeing Yezhov, the iron commissar, for the last time. They hysterically shouted about the blow on February 23, the day that Stalin ordered to be considered the day of the Red Army. This call was constantly heard in the speeches of the delegates of the XVIII Party Congress and even at the mourning meeting on the occasion of the death of the famous Soviet pilot Polina Osipenko in a plane crash.

Just four days after the removal of Litvinov - on May 7, 1939 - at the solemn graduation ceremony of students of military academies, Stalin made a short but expressive speech, in particular, saying: "The Workers' and Peasants' Army should become

the most aggressive offensive armies ever! The thunderous applause that greeted the appearance of the leader on the podium drowned out the magical preamble he uttered indistinctly: "If the enemy imposes war on us."

Colonel Rodimtsev, who recently returned from Khalkhin Gol, assured the "leaders" sitting on the presidium: "We swear to carry out the order of Comrade Voroshilov to defeat any aggressor on his own territory!" In an atmosphere of unprecedented military psychosis, the military budget was doubled, and the military industry, which had never been seen before in the world, continued to develop.

Almost openly, a huge invasion army is unfolding in Europe. But who is this enemy that must be defeated on his own territory? It is never called directly. There are enemies around. Whoever they point out specifically, we will smash on his own territory with little bloodshed ...

The roar of trumpets and drums comes from Berlin as well. Parades, tank rallies, Luftwaffe reviews, fiery speeches by the Fuhrer at the ceremony of launching the newest German battleships Bismarck and Tirpitz. Plan Z promised to the admirals is being implemented. But first of all, we need to deal with Poland.

The hysteria raised by Hitler's propaganda around the "Danzig Corridor" leaves no doubt about Hitler's further intentions. The thunder of military marches coming from Moscow and Berlin does not scare London politicians very much. Informative reports on the state of the Wehrmacht and the Red Army regularly fall on the desks of the Victorian-style offices of Whitehall. The Wehrmacht during the invasion of Czechoslovakia, without meeting any resistance, showed itself far from the best. Tanks got stuck even on the roads. The soldiers are poorly trained. Constant traffic jams and general confusion indicate that the work of headquarters at all levels is very far from perfect ...

On the other hand, the Red Army. The massacre perpetrated by Stalin practically reduced the largest army in the world to a huge herd of sheep, cowardly waiting for the next butcher's ax to fall on. There is no initiative. Drunkenness and theft flourish in the army, denunciations are pouring in, no one trusts each other.

The work of the headquarters is almost completely paralyzed. The doctrine put forward by Stalin of conducting an offensive war "on foreign territory" has not yet found any reflection in operational documents. There are also no plans for defense. A huge army is deployed along the border, like a herd at a paddock.

The belligerent statements of the two leaders of world totalitarianism can be considered a bluff to a large extent, but their complete irresponsibility can lead to the most unexpected development of events. At the same time, the first steps towards each other are being planned and carefully taken, which can only be welcomed, because when this meeting occurs, a war between the two continental superpredators is inevitable.

So far, the entire initiative for rapprochement comes from Moscow. So, two days after the removal of Litvinov, Georgy Astakhov, Charge d'Affaires of the USSR, appeared at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin and, in a conversation with Schnurre's adviser, hinted at the possibility of resuming trade negotiations.

On May 20, the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Schulenburg, talked for two hours with the new People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, who made it clear to the German that there were prerequisites for a radical improvement in Soviet-German economic and political relations. When asked by Schulenburg how this could be done in practice, Molotov, saying goodbye, replied: "We both need to think about this ..."

On May 21, the British and French General Staffs hold a secret meeting, at which the earlier decisions on the tactics of waging war with Germany and its rapid strangulation in the event of aggression against Poland are confirmed. The question is no longer worth fighting or not in the event of an attack on Poland. The answer is unambiguous - to fight. At the same time, the militant rage of Moscow is cooling down. Several English journals report the concentration of British bombers on Middle Eastern airfields. Within their range is the only Soviet source of oil - Baku. Second Baku

There is no Soviet Union, and one can easily imagine what will happen to the mines, which have not been modernized since 1912, if British bombs fall on them.

Stalin almost bites the handle of his pipe. England! Damn England! Imperialist nest!
But the hint is understood - one must be more careful - if his plan succeeds, then the British will end anyway.

On May 22, in an atmosphere of operatic pomposity, Hitler and Mussolini sign an agreement on a military alliance - the "Pact of Steel". After signing the pact, Hitler confesses to his friend and ally that he intends to attack Poland before autumn. The Duce, in his own words, "cold hands." Blushing and stuttering, he confesses to the Fuhrer that Italy is completely unprepared for war. But Hitler does not build any illusions about the combat capability of his ally. The main thing is that the cunning British do not lure Italy to their side, as happened in the First World War.

On May 23, Hitler gathers his top generals for a new meeting. He again reminds them that war is inevitable, since his decision to attack Poland at the first opportunity remains unchanged. On the Fuhrer's desk, in a special folder of green morocco, lies the protocol of the last secret meeting of the English and French general staffs obtained by intelligence. Hitler is skeptical. The usually clumsy service of Canaris worked very quickly. The day before yesterday there was only a meeting, and the protocol is already on his desk. Was this information planted by the British, who are well-known masters of such things? He does not believe that these Anglo-Saxons, fat with luxury, could decide to go to war. They have already shown their true colors in Munich. But in any case, it doesn't change anything, because it's not about Danzig, it's not even about Poland, its main goal is to bring England to its knees. If the British want war, they will get it. A surprise attack should destroy their fleet, and they are finished. They managed to avoid defeat in the battle of Jutland, but this will not happen again. Providence put him, Hitler, at the head of the resurgent Germany in order to punish England!

As always, in the course of his speech, Hitler inflates himself, screams frantically, and gesticulates furiously. The generals listen in silence, their monocles gleaming coldly. They do not share their Fuhrer's optimism. On the contrary, they believe that Germany is completely unprepared for war, especially for war with England, relying on the resources of her vast empire. The generals - all participants in the First World War - were well aware of the English plan for a future war. In the present state of Germany, it will happen exactly as the British plan.

On May 24, the head of the rear of the armed forces of the Reich, General Thomas, expressing the general opinion of his colleagues, submits a secret report to the Fuhrer. In his report, the general draws the Fuhrer's attention to the following: the German armed forces, including the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, have a total supply of fuel for six months, all types of rubber, including raw rubber, for no more than two months; non-ferrous metals, nickel and chromium - for three months, aluminum - for six months. No less a crisis state with ammunition. In the warehouses of the Air Force, air bombs are barely enough for three months

non-intense war. Artillery and tanks have three rounds of ammunition in reserve - for three weeks of a not very intense war with a deliberately weak enemy.

Thomas's report was accompanied by a memorandum from Grand Admiral Raeder, to whom the Fuhrer solemnly promised that he would not start a war with England until 1943. The admiral was present at the conference on May 23 and realized that the Fuhrer had already forgotten about the promise given to the fleet. He recalls that the construction of battleships has long been behind schedule due to

shortage of raw materials, and if the war with England begins this year, then the German fleet will only have to "show how to die with honor."

The generals do not know that at the same time the Fuhrer received a formidable paper from the board of the Reichsbank, where, with the frankness characteristic of bankers, it was said that the financial situation of the Reich was close to disaster. In the event of war, the financiers emphasized, with the total mobilization of all means and resources, by 1943 Germany would exhaust everything to the bottom and cease to exist as a state [6].

Moreover, notes a secret document of the Reichsbank, the German economy is also on the verge of collapse due to strong militarization in the virtual absence of an external market after the "Aryanization" of Jewish capital.

Hitler furiously crumples the received papers. He runs around the office past the drawn-out adjutants, accusing his generals of cowardice and betrayal. Stalin, who slaughtered his generals, did the greatest deed of his life. Powerless, he falls into a chair, before his eyes again the impudent smile of Foch in the Compiègne Forest, German sailors floundering under machine-gun fire in the icy waters of Scapa Flow, the pipes and masts of the flooded German dreadnoughts. He feels an invisible stranglehold tighten around his throat, and convulsively tears at his collar, loosening his tie. He knows very well what kind of noose it is. Let him die in the deadly struggle that has begun, but the Jews will also pay dearly for his death! So precious that they will never forget it.

Stepping silently on the carpet, the adjutants pick up scattered papers and place them respectfully on the table in front of the Fuhrer. He sits with his eyes closed, massaging his throat with his hand, convulsively squeezing the arm of the chair with his other hand. The predatory imperial eagle on the wall, clutching the swastika with its claws, spread its wings over the ancient tapestry, on which the troops of Frederick the Great are launching a bayonet attack on all of Europe...

The carpet paths of the office hide the steps of Stalin's soft Caucasian boots. A disheveled beard and a Jewish-appreciative look of Marx from a portrait on the wall, looking with some fear at the personification of his economic ideas from the time of the primitive accumulation of capital. The recently approved coat of arms of the Soviet Union is hoisted on another wall. Stylized ears of wheat, like strategic arrows, cover the defenseless globe, already completely covered by the "Hammer and Sickle" with a red star shining over the whole world. The idea of a coat of arms inspires, making you constantly think about its implementation.

Soviet intelligence is global. There are no secrets in the world that do not fall into her all-seeing eye. Our own network, the network of the Comintern, recruited emigrants, recruited English, French, Spanish and Belgian aristocrats, German and Italian anti-fascists, the leadership of the Catholic Church, powerful Jewish circles [7] - provide such a flow of information in which it is time to drown. Stalin personally deals with the analysis of intelligence data, and only Stalin. He makes decisions. This is known in the West, especially after fleeing under their wing in 1937-38. several leading Soviet residents, and connect an equally powerful and attractive flow of disinformation to the Soviet information flow. Let Stalin analyze it [8].

One by one, the minutes of secret meetings in London, conferences with the Fuhrer, conversations in Warsaw, Bucharest, Belgrade and Istanbul are laid down on Stalin's desk. A copy of General Thomas's top secret report is handed over to Moscow on the same day that it is furiously crumpled by Hitler. Two hours to translate - and Stalin has it. A copy of the Reichsbank memorandum gets to Stalin four hours earlier than to Hitler, even taking into account

translation. But here is the "misinformation" concocted by someone: a secret agreement was concluded between Beck and Hitler on a joint attack on the USSR with the involvement of England, and possibly France. Code name for Operation Crusade. The secrecy of the operation is ensured by the aggravation of the "German-Polish" propaganda war, under the guise of which both countries will secretly mobilize, involve the Baltic states, Japan and Turkey. This "disinformation" worked, apparently, in London. But there is no 100% proof that this is "disinformation". There is a lot in common in the details.

Analysts from intelligence are silent under the tiger's gaze of the leader, licking lips parched with fear. In their department, every second was shot or imprisoned, including the entire leadership. If you say wrong, they will put you against the wall, if you say so, they will also put you against the wall. It is better to remain silent. Think for yourself, Comrade Stalin. Say "linden" - we will consider it "linden". As you say. Actually, all the years Stalin was striving for this, but somewhat overestimated his own intelligence.

Poorly educated, not understanding the complex processes of the world around him, being dominated by dogmas and prophecies imposed on him, he was unable to single-handedly understand that unthinkable bacchanalia that he himself started and which, as it seemed to him, he controlled. Put against the collective mind of the best minds in the world, he moved further and further away from reality in his assessments, constantly simplifying everything, artificially trying to bring many dynamic and ambiguous processes to the desired simple scheme, driving himself into a trap of deadly contradictions between the desired and the actual.

But so far everything seems to be going smoothly. So, the British are determined to start a war with Hitler if he attacks Poland. Hitler's decision to attack Poland is apparently also serious, but this decision is met with opposition in the army, which is afraid of war. And not without reason, according to the report of General Thomas. Hitler can also be cold at the last minute, or worse, he can be physically eliminated. Soviet intelligence had already sniffed out several conspiracies in the army to assassinate the Fuhrer. It would be very annoying.

During the Sudeten crisis, Stalin ordered to concentrate on the border with Czechoslovakia 30 infantry, 10 cavalry divisions, one tank corps, three separate tank brigades and 12 aviation brigades. Moreover, the conscription of 330,000 reservists was defiantly carried out. He himself could not really understand who he wanted to scare: the Western allies, Hitler or the Czechs. Most of all, the Czechs, placed between two fires, were frightened and openly preferred Hitler to Stalin, while Stalin received nothing from this demarche but a headache. Such a situation, of course, should not be repeated. In this case, everything must be carefully considered.

We must make it clear to Hitler that the USSR is ready to liquidate his shortage of raw materials, to supply him with everything necessary, if only he decides on a European war, especially a war with England.

While the English and German fleets will destroy each other, the French and German armies will do the same along the fortified lines of Maginot and Siegfried in useless attacks and counterattacks, losing, as in the last war, 10,000 people a day. And then, for starters, we will take the Balkans and the straits. Let's just take it with our bare hands, appointing Comrade Dimitrov President of the Socialist Balkan Federation. We'll take the Baltics and Finland. These are our lands lost under the Brest Treaty. How else will the war in Poland go? There we will decide on the situation. The main thing is that the corporal does not get scared!

On May 30, Georgy Astakhov, having declared to the German Foreign Ministry, openly announced to the Deputy Reich Minister Weizsacker that the doors for the new trade

agreements between the USSR and Germany have been "open for a long time" and he does not understand that it is the Germans who are so hesitantly knocking at these doors. The stunned Weizsacker answered Astakhov that the recently concluded Berlin-Rome pact was not directed against the USSR, but was directed against the warmongers of England and France, which Astakhov did not ask him about, but took note of what was said with pleasure.

Both sides are still looking at each other suspiciously. The Germans are afraid that Moscow and London will unexpectedly come to an agreement between themselves, Moscow is also acting extra-cautiously, on the one hand, not to frighten the Germans, and on the other hand, to prevent London from understanding the ongoing Byzantine game. London sees how inexorably the USSR is drawing closer to Germany. An explosion is inevitable. In Whitehall, they rub their hands pretty. However, such a slow development of events unnerves Stalin. If Hitler really decided to attack Poland no later than September 1, then why the hell is he behaving so hesitantly?!

Hitler suffers, torn apart by complexes. He hates Stalin no less than Hitler's Stalin. Stalin interferes with his plans, and Stalin should have been destroyed in the first place, but the crumpled report of General Thomas lies on his desk, reminding and warning.

In addition, intelligence obtained materials (as it turned out later, planted by the British) that Moscow and Warsaw were on the eve of signing a secret agreement on joint actions against Germany. For military assistance, Poland agrees to give the USSR a free hand in the Baltics. Lithuania, irritated by the loss of the Klaipeda region in March of this year, is ready to join the agreement.

Time is running out, and there is very little time left before September 1st. Hitler cannot cancel the date set by him, but it cannot be allowed that, instead of the date of his next triumph, it becomes the date of another catastrophe in Germany. He understands that the Poles will not cowardly lay down their arms, like the Czechs. This will be a war. The thrill of the gambler shakes him from the realization of the risk of the planned game. There is nowhere to go - an alliance with Stalin is needed. Moreover, it is simply necessary!

While Hitler can't come to a decision by issuing instructions to his Foreign Office and immediately canceling them, Stalin takes the next cautious step forward. On July 18, the Soviet trade representative in Berlin, Yevgeny Babarin, appeared at the German Foreign Ministry to the economic adviser Schnurre and stated that the USSR wanted to expand and intensify Soviet-German trade relations. Babarin brought a draft agreement with a list of everything that the USSR intended and could supply to the Reich.

Hitler's breath was taken away. The Babarinsky project listed everything that General Thomas sounded the alarm in his report (it was not without reason that Stalin carefully studied this report), and in such quantity that it was possible to win back not one, but two world wars. All this was so fabulously tempting that it was not like the truth.

Ribbentrop instructs Schnurre to invite Astakhov and Babarin to some chic restaurant and probe them over a glass of wine in an informal intimate setting.

The meeting at the restaurant on July 26 dragged on past midnight. Both Russians kept themselves at ease and frankly. Georgy Astakhov, to the nod of Babarin in agreement, explained that the policy of restoring friendly relations fully corresponds to the vital interests of both countries. In Moscow, explained the Soviet chargé d'affaires, they absolutely cannot understand the reasons for such a hostile attitude of Nazi Germany towards the Soviet Union. Schnurre's adviser was quick to assure the Russians that the Reich's eastern policy had already completely changed. Germany in no way threatens Russia. On the contrary, Germany looks at completely

opposite direction. The target of her hostile policy is England. After all, by and large, Germany, Russia and Italy are connected by a common ideology directed against the decaying capitalist democracies and, above all, England. Is not it?

Over a wonderful dinner and glasses of collection wine, minor diplomats from Germany and Russia laid the foundation stone for a future war. Touched by Astakhov, he assured Schnurre's adviser that he would immediately report to Moscow everything he had heard.
table.

On July 29, German Ambassador Schulenburg receives a recording of a conversation in a restaurant through a courier and a demand to check the reaction of the Soviet government, to propose negotiations taking into account all the interests of the USSR from the Baltic and Black Seas.

On July 31, in a telegram sent to Schulenburg in Moscow, the words "urgent, top secret" appeared for the first time. Weizsäcker hurries Schulenburg, demanding to get an appointment with Molotov as soon as possible and finally find out the connection between the conversation in the restaurant over a glass of Rhine wine and Stalin's position.

The Germans are nervous. They know who they are dealing with. The archives of the secret police in Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main contain many examples of those methods that the Land of the Soviets considers quite common in diplomatic practice.

Even the first Soviet ambassador to Germany, Joffe, was not at all embarrassed, right at the embassy he distributed weapons to communist militants to carry out a proletarian uprising. Embassy workers with diplomatic passports in their pockets openly took on the role of combat instructors for "working squads", bringing militants from all over the world to Germany.

The Germans know that when it comes to creating a worldwide communist empire, you can expect anything from the Russians. And now intelligence, as well as the German ambassador in Paris, von Welzek, are reporting that the USSR, England and France have transferred negotiations to a purely military channel, where the chiefs of staff will work out the details of the fastest destruction of Germany. Moreover, the French delegation should be headed by General Demon, the former chief of staff of the famous Weygand.

The Germans, despite the abundance of information, did not understand that the Soviets were negotiating partly out of inertia, partly as a distraction.

The term "indirect aggression" put forward by the Soviet side allowed such a broad interpretation that it gave the USSR the formal right to occupy any country at Stalin's discretion. "

Indirect aggression "- this was another Stalinist novelty, with the help of which the leader modernized his famous doctrine" with little blood on foreign territory.

In the preamble of the draft treaty, the aggressor was mentioned, which now could be "indirect". The British and French did not understand this term at all. The Soviet side vehemently insisted on it, since Stalin pointed out that it was in this term that the whole essence of the problem lies.

Schulenburg, bombarded by desperate telegrams from Berlin, is trying to get an appointment with Molotov, but does not see in Moscow those radiant smiles that Astakhov and Babarin lavished in Berlin.

Only on August 3 did he meet with Molotov. Ribbentrop and Weizsäcker instructions

they demand that the ambassador transfer negotiations with the Russians to the area of "concrete" agreements and obtain Stalin's consent to a state visit to Moscow by Reich Minister Ribbentrop. Astakhov had already been hinted in Berlin that Germany was inviting the USSR to jointly "decide the fate of Poland," and Astakhov, as always, replied with a radiant smile. But Molotov is restrained. The Soviet Union has already done a lot. Now let the Germans take the initiative, especially since September 1 is less than a month away. "We are not in a hurry," Ribbentrop remarked to a smiling Astakhov in Berlin, but it was clear from the twitching face of the Reich Minister how he was clumsily bluffing - the Germans no longer had time. Now they will rush into the arms of the USSR and fall into the trap prepared by Stalin.

Molotov received Schulenburg more than coldly. Yes. The USSR is interested in improving Soviet-German relations, but so far it sees only "good intentions" from Germany. The People's Commissar reminds the ambassador of the Anti-Comintern Pact, Germany's support for Japan during the Soviet-Japanese conflict at Lake Khasan, and the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich Agreement. Schulenburg gets the impression that the Russians do not want any agreement with Germany at all, but still hope to reach an agreement behind the German back with the Western Allies.

The despondency that seized the Germans is dispelled by Astakhov. In a conversation with his friend Schnurre, the Soviet diplomat assures the economic adviser that there is no reason for unrest. Molotov agrees to discuss with the Germans all questions of interest to them, including the question of Poland. He only asks not to rush, but to act gradually. After all, Herr Reichsminister Ribbentrop emphasized the same thing: do not rush, act gradually.

But Hitler no longer has time to act "gradually", and this is well understood in Moscow. It's already the middle of August.

On August 14, Ribbentrop instructs Schulenburg to meet urgently with Molotov. The minister reminds the ambassador of the former friendship between the two countries and emphasizes that he speaks "on behalf of the Fuhrer." Ribbentrop asks to obtain permission from the Russians for his visit to Moscow, so that he can "on behalf of the Fuhrer, express his views personally to Mr. Stalin." He demands that Schulenburg submit all this to Molotov in writing. Then Stalin would be accurately informed about the German intentions. Hitler is ready to divide between Germany and the USSR not only Poland, but also the whole of Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states, which he concedes to the Soviet Union in advance. Let Stalin know about it!

Stalin chuckles and, which happens to him extremely rarely, publicly pats Molotov on the shoulder. The Germans have swallowed the bait and are climbing on Stalin's spear. And where should they go? The poor should sit quietly at home, and not dream of world domination. Intelligence reported to Stalin that on August 14, Hitler was again gathering generals and confirmed his intention to do away with Poland.

He, Stalin, is sure that the British will certainly intervene in the German-Polish war, but not because if their guarantees to Poland are not fulfilled, England will lose the status of a great power, but because "in the era of imperialism, wars are inevitable." So Ilyich taught. And he was never wrong!

On August 15, Schulenburg again made his way to an appointment with Molotov. Molotov met the ambassador with an expression of frank boredom on his face: "Well, what else do you have there? I do not have much time". Schulenburg nervously reads Ribbentrop's message to him. Molotov is getting better. He welcomes Germany's desire to improve relations with the USSR. As for Ribbentrop's visit, it requires "sufficient preparation so that the exchange of views will lead to

concrete results. To what results? Well, let's say, how will the German government react to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union? Can it influence Japan to end the conflicts on the Mongolian border? How will Germany react to the accession of the Baltic states to the USSR? Let all this be thought over in Berlin, and then we will accept Ribbentrop. So why should he go?

Schulenburg, an old diplomat of the Kaiser school, is stunned. The Soviet Union proposes a non-aggression pact while in Moscow the Chiefs of Staff of the USSR, Britain and France are negotiating joint military action against Germany. The height of political cynicism! But the count's indignation is quickly cooled by another directive telegram from Berlin that arrived on August 16, where he is required to see Molotov again and inform him that "Germany is ready to conclude a non-aggression pact with the USSR for a period, if the Soviet Union wishes, for 25 years. Moreover, Germany is ready to guarantee the accession of the Baltic states to the USSR. And finally, Germany is ready to influence the improvement of Soviet-Japanese relations ...

The Führer believes that, in view of the external situation, fraught with the daily possibility of serious events (in this connection, explain to Herr Molotov that Germany does not intend to endure Polish provocations indefinitely), a quick and fundamental clarification of German-Russian relations is desirable. For this purpose, I am ready to personally fly to Moscow at any time after Friday, August 18, with full authority from the Führer to discuss the entire range of German-Russian relations and to sign, if necessary, the relevant treaties. I ask you to read the text again to Molotov word for word and immediately request the opinion of the Russian government and Stalin himself on this matter. In conclusion, Ribbentrop points out that it is best to arrange for his arrival in Moscow at the end of this or early next week.

In Berlin, with growing impatience and nervousness, they are waiting for an answer from Moscow, bombarding Schulenburg with additional instructions and indications of the most trifling nature. For example, to report the exact time of the upcoming reception at Molotov's.

Molotov met Schulenburg very coldly. He again recalls the former hostility of Germany towards the USSR. He has nothing to add to what he said about Ribbentrop's visit last time. He hands the German ambassador a note full of reproaches, suspicions and omissions. The note ends with the words: "If, however, the German Government has now decided to change its past policy in the direction of a serious improvement in political relations with the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government can only welcome such a change and, for its part, is ready to revise its own policy in the context of a serious improvement in relations with the Soviet Union. Germany". But for this, the Soviet note emphasizes, "serious and practical steps are needed." This is not done in one jump, as suggested by Ribbentrop.

What does "serious and practical steps" mean? Well, let's say we conclude a trade agreement. Then something else. And there you can think of a non-aggression pact. It would not be bad to provide this treaty with a special protocol, taking into account certain specific interests of the USSR and Germany. And so - hurry up and make people laugh ...

Stalin pulls. Let the Germans mature properly and offer Moscow the maximum they can. He is well aware that in his hands is the key to launching a European war, and thinks through possible options, weighing his own chances. By nature, Stalin is not a player. He does not like to take risks, but likes to do everything for sure.

But has the time come to transfer to the world everything that has already been done in Russia and tested in Spain? Are the "proletarian battalions" ready to start their "iron march" around the world and crown it with the "Hammer and Sickle", as already done on the state emblem of the USSR?

Stalin hesitates. A huge army is deployed along the western borders. Almost the entire economy of a huge country works for the war. The secret figures of the reports lying on Stalin's desk are encouraging and inspiring. If two years ago the military industry produced annually 1911 guns, 860 aircraft and 740 tanks, then by the end of the past, in 1938, the economy, almost completely transferred to the war footing, began to produce 12687 guns, 5469 aircraft and 2270 tanks per year. A new law on "universal conscription" is already ready, which should increase the army, which is already unthinkable for peacetime, almost three times.

Stalin is pleased. Created an almost triple military advantage over any combination of possible adversaries. Perhaps you can start. Start slowly, gradually, without burrowing ...

And the situation in Berlin was already reminiscent of panic. In the eyes of Ribbentrop, despair was frankly read. Even the constantly bluffing Hitler did not hide his anxiety. Every effort was made to hide the nervousness of the leadership from the army.

Another telegram flies to the German embassy in Moscow with the note "Very urgent. Secret", demanding that Schulenburg immediately get a new meeting with Molotov.

"I ask you," Ribbentrop telegraphs, "to convey to Herr Molotov the following: "Under normal circumstances, we would naturally also be prepared to pursue a policy of improving Soviet-German relations through the usual diplomatic channels in accordance with established practice. But in the present unusual situation, in the opinion of the Führer, it became necessary to use a different method, which could lead to quick results. German-Polish relations are becoming more tense day by day. We must take into account the fact that on any day an incident may occur that will make an armed conflict inevitable ... The Führer considers it important that we are not taken by surprise by this conflict, without having had time to improve Soviet-German relations. He believes that in the event of such a conflict it will be difficult to take into account all Russian interests without a preliminary clarification of Soviet-German relations.

The ambassador was instructed that he should remind Molotov of the successful passage of the "first stage" of the negotiations, i.e. about the Soviet-German trade agreement, which was signed "just on this day" (August 18), and about the need to move to the "second stage" of negotiations. Ribbentrop again reminds that he is ready to urgently fly to Moscow, having the authority to negotiate with "taking into account all Russian wishes." What wishes? The tormented Ribbentrop no longer hides this either:

"I have been given the right to sign a special protocol regulating the interests of both parties in various foreign policy issues. For example, in establishing spheres of interest in the Baltic region. However, this seems to be possible only in oral conversation," emphasizes Ribbentrop.

There is nowhere to retreat. He instructs Schulenburg that this time, under no circumstances should he accept the Russian "no".

The tension is rising. In German ports, "pocket" battleships and divisions of submarines are in full combat readiness, waiting for orders to enter the communications of the British. But the order cannot be given until news is received from Moscow, and every hour of delay means that the warships will not have time to deploy in the assigned areas before September 1st. The two army groups destined for the defeat of Poland must also be brought closer to the frontier. But there is no signal because

Stalin has not yet said yes. Hitler yells at Ribbentrop that he and his diplomats are "not good for hell." He will disperse them all - "these Kaiser stinkers" and order them to be formed from

of them is a marching battalion, whose sergeant-major Ribbentrop will appoint.

The hours are ticking by, but there is no news from Moscow. The tension becomes completely unbearable. In the Fuhrer's waiting room, the phone rings piercingly. The adjutant hands the phone to Ribbentrop. Advisor Schnurre reports. Negotiations with the Russians for a trade treaty yesterday ended in full agreement, but the Russians evaded signing the treaty, saying they would do so at noon today. Just received a call from the Soviet embassy that the signing of the treaty was being postponed due to political considerations in connection with the new instructions from Moscow. Ribbentrop hangs up. Hitler loosens his tie with a sharp movement. Excessive nervous tension constantly leads the Fuhrer to uncontrollable attacks of suffocation, which are removed either by an injection or some kind of hysterical trick. But there is no power for that either. Everything is clear - the Russians were lured away by the British at the last moment. He clearly sees the collapse of all his plans and his own death. The Fuhrer quickly runs out of the office, leaving Ribbentrop surrounded by adjutants ...

Meanwhile, in Moscow, the proud Count von Schulenburg is seeking a new reception from Molotov. Officials-bureaucrats from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs answer him that the people's commissar is very busy and cannot receive the ambassador before tomorrow, say, at 20.00. No, no, Schulenburg insists, that's impossible. He has an important job. Okay, call me in half an hour. Half an hour has passed. The People's Commissar apologizes, the official says, but he can't receive the ambassador before tomorrow evening. If the Ambassador has an urgent matter, he can put it on the phone. No, Schulenburg explodes, he will not present his case to the referents. He must see Molotov, this is extremely important. Tell the drug addict that it's extremely! Okay, call me in an hour. The second hand crawls languidly along the dial, counting sixty circles. Call. Busy. Another call is busy. Still - the line is free, but no one comes up. Then a new voice. What? Okay, I'll report now. Call in half an hour. The Count wipes cold sweat from his forehead. Ten minutes later the bell rings at the embassy: the people's commissar will receive the ambassador at 14.00.

Excited and stuttering like a schoolboy, Schulenburg read out another message from Ribbentrop to Molotov. Molotov listens impassively. Stalin from the portrait on the wall, squinting slyly, looks at the German ambassador.

With obvious signs of impatience, Molotov listens to Schulenburg to the end. No, he says, I don't understand your haste. Our position remains the same. First, a trade agreement. It will be concluded today or tomorrow. Then we will publish it and see what effect it will cause abroad. And only then will we deal with the non-aggression act and the protocols. At the present time the Soviet government cannot say even approximately the date of Ribbentrop's visit. Such a visit requires very thorough preparation. Very. Schulenburg tries to object, but Molotov gets up and coldly declares that "he has nothing to add to what has been said." Schulenburg, feeling that "his heart is about to break", returns to the embassy.

He sketches a draft of his dispatch to Berlin. Tears it, crumple it and throws it into the basket. The secretary brings a new bundle of telegrams from Berlin. All marked "Urgent. Secret! Schulenburg no longer has the strength to read them. The inhuman tension of the last week, the ironic glances of his own employees, the contemptuous fold of Molotov's lips - all this is already beyond his strength. He understands that his diplomatic career is over. The time has come for retirement.

This decision makes him feel a little better. The count is making a dispatch when he is suddenly informed that Molotov is asking for him on the phone. The surprised ambassador picks up the phone. Molotov

apologizes for the disturbance and asks the ambassador to come to him again today at 16.30.

This time Molotov is courtesy itself. Smiling amiably, he tells the stunned Schulenburg that the Soviet government has revised its views and now believes that the non-aggression pact must be concluded as soon as possible. Therefore, Molotov was instructed to hand over to the German side for study the draft of this treaty, as the Soviet side understands it. In this connection, the Soviet government agrees to receive Reichsminister Ribbentrop sometime on 26 or 27 August.

Count Schulenburg understands that this change in Molotov's views was due to the direct intervention of Stalin, and this intervention took place between half past two and half past four on August 19th. The jubilant ambassador quickly writes a telegram to Berlin:

"Secret. Of extreme importance.

The Soviet government agrees to receive the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs in Moscow a week after the announcement of the signing of the economic agreement. Molotov said that if the signing of the economic agreement was announced tomorrow, then the Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs could arrive in Moscow on August 26 or 27 ... "

Hitler nervously crumples the long-awaited telegram from his ambassador in his hand. August 26 or 27! The entire schedule for the invasion of Poland, calculated for a short period of time before the onset of the autumn rains, flies to hell. It is necessary that Ribbentrop be received three days earlier. What to do? Stop asking the footman for a visit, you need to ask the owner. Forgetting about pride, Hitler personally sits down to write a message to Stalin, asking the Soviet dictator to receive the twitchy and almost crying Ribbentrop as soon as possible. In anticipation of the execution of his own plans, Hitler forgets how much dirt and hatred they poured with Stalin on each other's heads over the past five years.

"Moscow. Mr Stalin.

I sincerely welcome the signing of the new German-Soviet trade agreement as the first step in changing German-Soviet relations. The conclusion of the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union means to me the long-term basis of German policy. Thus, Germany is resuming a political course that was beneficial to both states during the past centuries ...

I have accepted the draft non-aggression pact submitted by your Foreign Minister, Mr. Molotov, but I consider it essential to clear up some issues related to this pact as soon as possible. The essence of the additional protocol, so desired by the Soviet Union, in my opinion, can be agreed upon in the shortest possible time if the responsible German representative can personally come to Moscow for negotiations ...

The tension between Germany and Poland is becoming unbearable... Any day a crisis could arise. Germany is now determined to defend the interests of the Reich with all the means at her disposal. In my opinion, it is desirable that our two countries establish new relations without wasting time. Therefore, I again propose that you receive my Foreign Minister on Tuesday, August 22, as a last resort

on Wednesday 23 August. Taking into account the international situation, the stay of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Moscow for more than two days seems completely impossible. I will be glad to receive your reply as soon as possible.

Adolf Hitler".

For the next 24 hours, starting on Sunday evening, August 20, the Führer was already close to collapse. He couldn't sleep. In the middle of the night, Hitler called Goering and confessed how worried he was about Stalin's reaction to the message sent to him, how he was tormented and enraged by all these Moscow delays.

Hours of agonizing waiting flowed again, interrupted by nervous calls to Schulenburg. At three o'clock in the morning the ambassador was roused from his bed to find out if he had received the Führer's dispatch, which he should immediately hand over to Molotov. Schulenburg replied that he had not yet received anything. How so? Schulenburg calms his twitchy bosses in Berlin, reminding him that "taking into account the two-hour time difference, the official telegram from Berlin to Moscow takes four to five hours. To this must be added the time required for deciphering.

At 10.15 Ribbentrop again disturbs the ambassador: "Do your best to make my visit take place at the time indicated in the telegram." Schulenburg replies that the Führer's message has been received and will be handed over to Molotov at 1500.

Hours of hassle creep on again, the terrible torture of time when so much is at stake. What decision will the Kremlin dictator make? What a vile feeling when you realize that the fulfillment of your plans does not depend on you, but on a completely outsider whom you hate and clearly know that he hates you! But there is nowhere to go. Everything is in the hands of Stalin. The life and death of Germany, the fate of Europe, and by and large - the whole world.

Finally, at 9:35 p.m. on August 21, 1939, Stalin's reply arrives in Berlin, composed in an elegant "new language":

"To the Chancellor of the German Reich A. Hitler.

Thank you for your letter. I hope that the German-Soviet non-aggression pact will mark a decisive turn in the improvement of political relations between our countries...

The Soviet Government has instructed me to inform you that it agrees that Herr von Ribbentrop should arrive in Moscow on 23 August.

I. Stalin.

The German radio, which was broadcasting a musical program, suddenly interrupted the transmission, calling the listeners to attention. The solemn voice of the announcer announced an emergency message: "The Reich government and the Soviet government have come to an agreement to conclude a non-aggression pact with each other. The Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs will arrive in Moscow on Wednesday, August 23, to negotiate.

There was jubilation at the Berghof, especially evident against the backdrop of the previous two weeks, full of

anxiety and uncertainty. Hitler's mortal enemy, Stalin, gave the green light to the European war, promising Hitler at least friendly neutrality. The next day, August 22, Hitler called his generals to a new conference, urging them to wage war "brutally and without mercy," emphasizing that he would probably give the order to attack Poland on August 26 - six days earlier than planned. Excited to the limit, forgetting that just a few hours earlier he had been rushing around the office waiting for Stalin's answer, like a criminal waiting for the death sentence to be overturned, Hitler pompously declared to the generals, who listened to their Fuhrer with a mixture of fear and distrust:

"Mostly everything depends on me, on my existence, on my political talents. Moreover, no one will ever again have the full confidence of the German people as I do. It is probable that never in the future will there appear a person with such authority as I have. So my very existence is a factor of great value. But I can be destroyed at any moment by a criminal or a maniac..."

Noting also the greatness and authority of such personalities as Mussolini and Franco, Hitler emphasized that neither in England nor in France "there are no outstanding personalities" of such a magnitude as he, and therefore these countries do not pose any serious danger.

Gradually calming down. Hitler continued: "We made this decision easily. We have nothing to lose, we can only gain. Our economic situation is such that we cannot last more than two or three years. Göring can attest to this. We have no other choice but to start a war..."

Again inflamed and almost turning into a cry, Hitler declares that he does not believe in the determination of the Western countries to start a war against him. But even if that happens, what can England and France do? How can they specifically threaten the Reich? Blockade? It will be completely ineffective, since we have already acquired a powerful source of supply in the East, independent of sea routes.

And, finally, Hitler threw out a trump ace to the silent generals: "England and France hoped that after the invasion of Poland, Russia would become our enemy. But the enemies did not take into account the great strength of my determination. Our enemies are little boogers. I saw them in Munich.

I was convinced that Stalin would never accept England's offer. Only a blind optimist could think that Stalin would be so crazy that he would not understand the true intentions of England. Russia is not interested in the existence of Poland... The removal of Litvinov was decisive. It sounded to me like a cannon shot, as a sign of a change in Moscow's attitude towards the Western powers.

"The only thing I'm afraid of," Hitler confessed to the still silent generals, "is that some filthy pig won't come in at the last moment with an offer of mediation."

The order to start hostilities, finished Hitler, he would give later. Most likely, it will be Saturday, August 26th.

On August 23, around noon, two large three-engined Condors landed in Moscow with Ribbentrop and his large retinue. The Reich Minister was met by Molotov and, as they say, "other officials." Wary glances and dry handshakes of the first minutes of the meeting were quickly replaced by complete mutual understanding, jokes, and friendly toasts. "I felt like I was among my party comrades," Ribbentrop later confessed, touched.

Both sides, having quickly agreed on the division of Poland and on granting the USSR a free hand in the Baltics and Finland, unanimously agreed that England was solely to blame for the current international crisis.

Stalin kindly listened to Ribbentrop's complaint and, puffing on his pipe, sagely remarked: "If England dominates the world, it is due to the stupidity of other countries, which have always allowed themselves to be deceived." Fascinated by Stalin, Ribbentrop began to justify himself in favor of the Anti-Comintern Pact, assuring the Soviet ruler that it was primarily directed against the "Western democracies."

He allowed himself to tell an anecdote that went around during the conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact among Berliners. Immediately realizing that the Anti-Comintern Pact was directed against British bankers and shopkeepers, they assured each other that Stalin himself would want to join this pact. No one has ever seen Stalin laugh so merrily. "We sincerely want peace," Ribbentrop assured Stalin, "but England provokes a war and puts us in a hopeless situation."

Stalin's hand rested gently on the shoulder of the Reich Minister. "I believe that this is true," the father of all nations said almost tenderly, "Germany wants peace."

Then Stalin raised his glass of wine and, to the great surprise of all those present, made a toast. "I know," the communist dictator said in a thoughtful tone, "how the German people love their Fuhrer. So I want to drink to his health!"

The Germans joyfully barked "Heil!" to the clink of glasses. Ribbentrop immediately offered a return toast to Stalin's health. Then Molotov drank to the health of the Reich Minister, and he, in turn, to the health of Molotov. Stalin drank his fifth glass to the newly signed non-aggression pact. Ribbentrop raised his glass to the health of the Soviet government. Answering him, Molotov offered to drink to a new era in German-Soviet relations. Ribbentrop drained the next glass for eternal friendship. Stalin, raising his glass high like a Caucasian horn, proposed a toast to the German people.

Nobody drank for the Soviet people. Somehow they forgot about him. In the early morning Stalin took Ribbentrop, who was very tipsy, by the arm and, breathing the vapors of Kakhétian in his ear, said: "The Soviet government takes the new pact very seriously. I can guarantee with my word of honor that the Soviet Union will never betray its partner." Ribbentrop laid his hand ceremoniously over his heart. What could the Reichsminister answer? Nothing depended on him. He was doing someone else's will. And Stalin? The iron tread of the proletarian battalions was already sounding in his ears, marching through war-ravaged Europe, over the corpses of Polish, German, English and French soldiers. He himself will decide when this treaty will cease to be in force. Hitler has nowhere to go with his poor resources. He will do whatever he is told from Moscow. So far, everything is going great!

What did Hitler think? Didn't he himself prophetically write in Mein Kampf:

The very fact of an alliance with Russia will make the next war inevitable. And in the end, Germany will be finished." Indeed, he had nowhere to go!

Chapter 2

On August 24, Ribbentrop returned to Berlin. There from his residence in Berchtesgaden

Hitler arrived. Ribbentrop's head ached from a night of drinking in the Kremlin. It would be nice to get drunk, but the vegetarian Hitler, frowning at his Reichsminister, is good! – could only offer him a glass of mineral water. Rubbing his forehead, Ribbentrop enthusiastically reported to the Fuhrer about his trip to Moscow. So we start. As soon as our troops reach Warsaw, the Russians attack the Poles from the east. They will come up with a reason for the strike themselves. They will fully provide us with raw materials and moral support for the war in the West. The entire Stalinist secret gang in Europe will work for us, or at least not work against us. For this, Stalin asks for half of Poland, the Baltic states, Finland and Bessarabia. Hitler grimaces. We give a lot. A lot of? After all, these are old Russian territories lost during the national catastrophe of 1917. OK then. Let him take it, you dirty Asian extortionist! Trash! But, my Fuhrer, all this was agreed in advance. Yes, let him take it! Thank you, Ribbentrop! Everything is fine! At dawn on the 26th we start!

Fulfilling the order of the Fuhrer, German troops are rapidly advancing to the Polish border. At the tip of the wedge, in the direction of the main blow, providing a "blitzkrieg", the tank corps of General Guderian is deployed. Fifty-year-old Heinz Guderian is the founder and soul of the armored forces of the Reich. A fanatical admirer of the tactics of tank wedges, the theory of which he appreciated back in the mid-1920s in distant Kazan, impatiently waited for the dawn to prove for the first time in practice to the doubters how a modern war is being waged. His tanks should break through the Polish front with a powerful blow, dropping the scattered Polish troops into prepared "bags", and swiftly, without waiting for the infantry, move to Warsaw.

Standing at his staff tankette, the general looked with joy and excitement at the columns of tanks passing by him. The commanders, leaning out of the tower hatches, greeted their beloved general.

And at that moment, out of nowhere, a liaison officer who came from nowhere handed Guderian a package marked urgently. The general opened the package and could not believe his eyes: the offensive was cancelled. Fuhrer's order. Guderian glanced at his watch. There was no time for emotions. Jumping on the bandwagon of the headquarters armored personnel carrier, the general rushed after his tanks in order to have time to stop them. The huge army of the Reich, ready for the invasion, froze at the very threshold of war. Headquarters puzzled over what could have happened? And the smallest thing happened. Speaking in Parliament, British Prime Minister Chamberlain, calling the Soviet-German treaty an "unpleasant surprise," further stated the following: we and France will no longer fulfill our obligations towards Poland. False hopes!"

Even the day before, on August 23, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, handed the Führer a personal message from Chamberlain. Calling on Hitler not to entertain the illusion that the pact signed in Moscow would change England's position with regard to its obligations to Poland, the British Prime Minister openly warned the Fuhrer of the inevitability of war.

Believing that he had made his position "absolutely clear", Chamberlain again urged Hitler to seek a peaceful solution to his differences with Poland, offering British mediation, cooperation and assistance to this end.

Hitler, with his frivolous militancy, did not take this message into account. You never know what you can write in a personal message. Let's see what the British will sing when they find out about the treaty with Stalin! But Chamberlain's speech in Parliament sobered Hitler up like a blow to the head. A speech in parliament is not a personal message, these are words spoken to the whole world. Now it is clear that the British are not bluffing - they are ready to start a war and fight it for as long as necessary.

Before the eyes of Hitler again there are pictures of the battles on Ypres and the Somme. Desperate attempts by the Kaiser's army to break through to the English Channel, monstrous losses without any result. Dim as hell, the lights and the monstrous smells of the evacuation hospital. The ghost of Scapa Flow...

Grand Admiral Raeder literally pushes his way to the reception, dispersing the adjutants. Normally calm and reserved, the Admiral now makes no secret of his near-hysteria state. Almost half of Germany's merchant and passenger ships are at sea or in foreign ports. War with England means their inevitable death. If the war begins with the loss of half of the merchant tonnage, then it can no longer be waged, but directly surrender!

The Admiral, like Hitler, has something to remember. He remembers how they went out to sea in the last war, head to shoulder, watching the horizon with horror, trying with all their might to avoid any combat contact with the British. He remembers how cowardly they shelled fishing villages on the east coast of England under the cover of fog, trembling with excitement and fear, in the hope that they would not be caught. And when they were nevertheless caught at Jutland and forced into battle, then Raeder knew better than others that it was not a "great victory", but rather a "miraculous salvation".

The generals, who also remembered the last war well, were also nervous. They were divided into two categories: those who experienced triumph on the eastern front, breaking up their enemy and imposing the Brest Peace on him, looked at the future conflict more optimistically than those who survived the shame of capitulation in the Compiègne forest, signing it under the malicious grin of Marshal Foch. But both those and others do not want to fight on two fronts anymore. How good it was until now, when the Wehrmacht seized territories without firing a shot, thanks to the ingenious diplomacy of the Fuhrer! To fight with Poland is still all right! But with England? They already know the power of this small, eternally foggy island called Albion. And who better than the generals to know that Germany is completely unprepared for war.

Hitler thinks. With difficulty, he suppresses another hysterical outburst. He despises those swaggering straight-backed cowards with pewter monocles. But he can't help listening to them. Moreover, they are largely right. He still does not know that the overwhelmed generals are already preparing a conspiracy to physically eliminate him, which twice only a case saved him from the "Zossen" conspirators. And he gives the order to stop the troops! Having expelled the military from the office, Hitler called Goering saying that he had canceled the order to invade Poland.

"Is this a temporary measure or a final solution?" asked the astonished Reichsmarshal.

Hitler rarely hid the truth from his "Parteigenossen", and so he honestly said in a tired voice: "I have to see if we can not eliminate the British interference..."

And so Hitler, who quite recently stated that his greatest fear is that "some dirty pig does not fit in at the last moment as an intermediary", he himself begins feverishly looking for this intermediary. It turns out to be a certain Dahlerus - a Swedish citizen, a banker and businessman, an international adventurer who worked for five intelligence services, including Soviet and, of course, English.

Dahlerus is on warm friendly terms with Goering, with the British Foreign Minister Halifax, with the Polish Foreign Minister Beck and, of course, with Madame Kollontai, who conquered Stockholm with her elegant dressings and lectures on true freedom of spirit and conscience in the Soviet Union.

Dahlerus receives instructions from the Germans to tell the British that Hitler is ready to negotiate with the Poles peacefully. He only needs the Danzig corridor, and not even the entire corridor, but only the area along the railway track with several stations ...

In Moscow, Stalin breaks his cigarette with a crunch, but instead of filling his pipe with tobacco, he angrily throws it into the ashtray. The dictator's eyes turn completely yellow. It is at such moments that the fingers of the faithful and experienced Poskrebyshev grow cold. What Stalin feared most of all happened: at the last moment, the corporal chickened out! Fascist scum! Trash! Cowardly bastard!

Stalin takes himself in hand. He fills his pipe, kindles it and hides behind a cloud of tobacco smoke ...

The luxurious mansion of the Soviet naval attaché Captain 1st Rank Vorontsov, located in the Grunewald district of Berlin in the center of a small park, seemed uninhabited in the evenings due to tightly curtained windows.

This is what it looked like on the evening of August 27, 1939. Several people were sitting in the large, somewhat tastelessly furnished office of Captain Vorontsov, who had already been promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral. Like the owner of the house, they were in civilian clothes. One of them was the frigate captain (captain of the 2nd rank) Norbert von Baumbach, the German naval attache in the USSR, who arrived in Berlin on business in order to receive clarifications from his command "in the light of new relations with the USSR." In the second, tall and lanky, with thinning blond hair, one could easily recognize the naval adjutant of the Fuhrer himself, Captain Zur See (Captain 1st Rank) Karl Puttkamer.

Vorontsov spoke, the Germans listened. With an elegant bone knife for cutting papers, Vorontsov drove along the map of the North Atlantic. German merchant ships in foreign ports and on the ocean have nothing to fear from the coming conflict with England. They should change course sharply to the north and go to Murmansk, where they can hide from the British for a while, and then, taking advantage of the bad weather and the impending polar night, break through along the Norwegian coast to Germany.

The Soviet government gave permission to shelter German ships in the northern ports of the USSR. The British do not expect this at all and will probably miss the whole operation. They will catch German ships in a completely different place: on the approaches to the English Channel and in the North Sea. A warm and friendly welcome awaits German sailors in Murmansk. Employees of the German embassy in Moscow can go there in advance ...

Meanwhile, Dalerus, chosen as an intermediary, having received appropriate instructions from Moscow, deliberately frustrates his mission, somewhere without saying something, or vice versa, saying too much. Hitler agrees to a meeting with the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Beck, but in a conversation with Lord Halifax and the Polish ambassador to Berlin Lipsky, Dahlerus, without any grounds for this, indicates that Beck can be treated like the unfortunate Hakha in his time. Hitler cannot be trusted, Dahlerus emphasizes.

"We don't trust your government!" British Ambassador Henderson openly declares to Hitler. "Who and when did I deceive?!" Hitler yells back. Henderson shrugs. You know better. Beck flatly refuses to go to Berlin, where he will be treated like Gakha.

"Don't you understand," Dahlerus confidently informs his friend Goering, "that the war is already a foregone conclusion by the British. But for the time being, with the USSR as a friendly neutral, you don't have to worry too much. The English need to be given a good, short lesson, and they will no doubt go to the world. Goering nods. Dahlerus' reasoning is in complete agreement with his views.

Admiral Raeder's report on the unexpected offer of the USSR to shelter German ships in

Murmansk made Hitler joyfully jump up from his chair and clap his hands with glee. The information that began to flow to the Fuhrer in the last hours clearly indicated that the USSR was not just a "neutral", even a friendly one, but almost an ally. Mutual hatred of England is stronger than minor ideological differences, mainly in wording. He knows more than the Admiral, but he doesn't tell Raeder yet. Let it be a surprise for him.

The question of the possibility of basing German submarines on the Soviet bases of the Kola Peninsula is being considered, from where they can conduct combat operations against the British with great efficiency. Soviet economic deliveries, he was told today, will not be carried out under the trade agreement that has just been concluded. They will be doubled. Moreover, if Germany, due to the British blockade, cannot carry out maritime trade with neutral countries, then the Soviet Trans-Siberian Railway is at the service of Germany.

All! To hell with all doubts - we must begin. The fighting enthusiasm of the Fuhrer, warmed up by Stalin's promises, did not sleep even after he was informed that on August 28 an Anglo-Polish agreement on mutual military assistance in the event of German aggression was signed [9]. The fact that the British guarantees had received the legal force of an alliance treaty could no longer frighten Hitler.

You can't lose the moment when practically all of Russia's raw material power (and perhaps even its military power) has been so unexpectedly placed at your disposal. The deadline for the invasion of Poland is 1 September.

Silence in the Soviet Union. The newspapers do not comment on the pact with Hitler that has just been concluded. The press is full of reports of military preparations in Poland, England and France. War hysteria in Poland. general mobilization. Polish cavalry preparing to march on Berlin. Monstrous pogroms of ethnic Germans in many cities of Poland. A brutal mob of Poles castrated a German youth. The Poles, incited by England, reject all German peace proposals. Anglo-French warmongers! Mobilization of the English fleet. The French army is only waiting for the order to re-occupy the Rhineland. Defenseless Germany is once again getting ready to be torn to pieces by imperialist predators!

August 31 Molotov makes a report at a session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. You can not stand on ceremony with the "deputies" sitting in the hall. They will eat whatever they are given. But the true plans of the Kremlin must be hidden from the world. Let world public opinion translate his "new speech" into human language for the time being, and then it will be too late. Molotov explains the essence of the German-Soviet pact to the hall, which was hushed from fear:

"We all know that since the Nazis came to power, relations between the Soviet Union and Germany have been tense ... But, as Comrade Stalin said on March 10, "we are for business relations with all countries." Seems,

that in Germany they correctly understood the statements of Comrade Stalin and drew the right conclusions. August 23 should be regarded as a date of great historical importance. This is a turning point in the history of Europe and not only Europe. More recently, the German Nazis pursued a foreign policy that was very hostile towards the Soviet Union. Yes, in the recent past... the Soviet Union and Germany were enemies. But now the situation has changed, and we have ceased to be enemies ...

According to the Soviet-German agreement, the Soviet Union is not obliged to fight either on the side of the British or on the side of the Germans. The USSR pursues its own policy, which is determined by the interests of the peoples of the USSR, and no one else. (Stormy applause.)

If these gentlemen have such a passionate desire to fight, let them fight themselves without the Soviet Union. (Laughter, applause). And we'll see what kind of warriors they are. (Loud laughter, applause)."

It was impossible to say frankly. Let them fight. We'll see what kind of warriors they are. And when the "interests of the peoples of the USSR" demand it, then we will intervene. On which side? And this, as demanded again by the "interests of the peoples of the USSR." The simpleton Hitler, apparently, did not understand the "new talk" at all, since a little later he publicly declared that he was ready to support every word from Molotov's speech at the Supreme Council.

When, after the Gleiwitz operation, sewn with white thread, Guderian's tanks rushed to Warsaw, the Soviet press almost did not react to this event. Newspapers were filled with reports from the grand celebration of athletes at the Dynamo stadium, about the festival in Sokolniki, about the solemn celebration of the International Youth Day in Moscow, Leningrad and Kyiv.

In the heat of continuous holidays and jubilation, the Soviet people simply did not notice the beginning of the Second World War, and the whole world, in turn, somehow did not notice the new USSR law on military duty, which almost tripled the size of the Red Army. Buried on the last pages of the newspapers, small notes with the standard heading "On the German-Polish conflict" created the impression of an insignificant local war, which had no meaning either for the USSR or for the rest of the world. The armed conflict, Pravda noted, began due to an attack by a group of Polish soldiers on a German radio station in the border town of Gleiwitz. Germany, exhausted by endless Polish provocations and subjected to direct aggression from Poland, was forced to take up arms.

The restraint of the Soviet press in no way conveys the joyful excitement that seized Stalin. His plan was completely successful! The second imperialist war in Europe began, confirming the genius of Lenin's foresight and the wisdom of Stalin's policy. Now it is necessary to undertake the implementation of the second phase of the plan - the capture of Europe. Do not rush, do not burrow, weigh each step. In an excellent mood, Stalin receives Dimitrov at his dacha. He himself pours kharko from the old-fashioned "Kuznetsov" tureen. Jokes. Dimitrov, of course, is not God knows who, to be frank with him. A former Comintern militant whom Stalin pulled out of Germany after the scandalous Leipzig trial and is preparing ahead of time for the role of the future president of the Socialist Balkan Federation. But the Balkans still need to be captured. Well, it's not far off. Therefore, after the execution of Bela Kun, he, Stalin, ordered not to touch the "Balkan comrades" like Dimitrov and Tito for the time being. Still useful.

"We are not averse to them (the imperialist powers," says Stalin, hiding a satisfied smirk in his mustache, "fight well and weaken each other. Hitler, without realizing it, shakes and undermines the capitalist system. We can maneuver, push one side against the other, so that we better tear ourselves apart." Struck by the unearthly wisdom of the Great Leader, Dimitrov freezes with a spoon in his hand.

The day before, in Berlin, Hitler, accepting his credentials from the new Soviet ambassador Alexander Shkvartsev, was gloomy and thoughtful. The Anglo-French ultimatums demanding the immediate withdrawal of German troops from Poland were running out. Hitler was tormented by doubts: would his acquired Moscow friend let him down at the last moment? Stalin specifically sent Shkvartsev at that very moment for a vacant position.

place of the Soviet ambassador to cheer the Fuhrer. Everything will be as agreed.

Hitler was especially interested in when the Soviet troops would invade Poland. Naively, he believed that this action would automatically make the USSR his ally, since England and France would be forced to declare war on the Soviet Union as well. He did not yet know the methods of Stalin, who had gone through the Leninist school of annexing the republics of Transcaucasia and the vast regions of Central Asia to the USSR. Even such a hardened political cynic as Hitler was, more than once will have to be amazed and admire Stalin's methods of seizing foreign territories. Komkor Purkaev assured the Fuhrer that the Soviet Union would never let its friends down.

Meanwhile, the war in Poland did not go exactly as planned in Berlin. On all sectors of the front, the Poles put up fierce resistance. The Polish troops, dissected by Guderian's tank wedges, having imposed a battle on the Dżura on the Germans and threatening the exit of large cavalry masses to the rear of the tank groups, managed to avoid encirclement and withdraw the main forces of their army behind the Vistula, where the Polish command hoped, regrouping forces, to go on the counteroffensive.

The entire press of the world, including the German one, noted the heroic resistance of the Polish army. The defense of Vasterplatte, Hel, Gdynia and Warsaw aroused the admiration of the whole world, and even the Volkischer Beobachter called the battle on the Dżura "the most fierce in history." The Soviet press kept quiet about all this. On the contrary, from issue to issue, all Soviet newspapers noted with surprise that the Poles did not offer any resistance to the Germans, that Poland was actually occupied, and it was not known where its government was located.

On September 14, the Pravda newspaper summed up this behavior of the Soviet press. "The question may arise," the newspaper asked in an editorial, "why the Polish army does not offer any resistance to the Germans? This is because Poland is not a one-national country. Only 60% of the population are Poles, the rest are Ukrainians, Belarusians and Jews... Eleven million Ukrainians and Belarusians lived in Poland in a state of national oppression... The Polish government pursued a policy of forced Polonization..." That is why no one wants to fight for such a country.

While abroad they were guessing what the monstrous nonsense contained in Pravda means, the solution did not take long. On September 17, the Polish ambassador to Moscow, Vaclav Grzybowski, was urgently summoned to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

Deputy People's Commissar Potemkin, who received him, made a mournful face, but without sorrow in his eyes and without intonations in his voice, read out a note as follows:

"The German-Polish war clearly showed the internal bankruptcy of the Polish state ... Warsaw, as the capital of Poland, no longer exists. The Polish government has collapsed and shows no signs of life. This means that the Polish state and the Polish government actually ceased to exist. Thus, the treaties concluded between the USSR and Poland ceased to be valid ... The Soviet government cannot also be indifferent to the fact that half-blooded Ukrainians and Belarusians living on the territory of Poland, left to the mercy of fate, remain defenseless.

In view of this situation, the Soviet government ordered the High Command of the Red Army to order the troops to cross the border and protect the lives and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus" [10].

The pale Grzybowski refused to accept the note and, in response, declared to Potemkin, on whose face the expression of grief was replaced by an expression of outright boredom: "None of the arguments used to justify the transformation of treaties into a mere piece of paper can withstand criticism ... The sovereignty of the state exists while the soldiers of the regular army are fighting . At the moment, next to us, not only Ukrainians and Belarusians are fighting against the Germans, but also the Czech and Slovak legions. Where did your Slavic solidarity go? .. Napoleon entered Moscow, but as long as Kutuzov's army existed, it was believed that Russia also existed ... "

Having given him a chance to speak, the Polish ambassador was sent out the door. He will still be remembered for his impudence and tactless questions about Slavic solidarity.

As Stalin promised, at exactly 6 o'clock in the morning on September 17, 1939, the Red Army, with the forces of two fronts - the Ukrainian one under the command of the infamous S. Timoshenko and the Belorussian one under the command of M. Kovalev - numbering more than a million soldiers, with the support of tanks, aviation and artillery, crossed the border of Poland along the entire length from Polotsk to Kamenetz-Podolsk, starting battles with a few Polish detachments covering the eastern border. The "Second Front" of the Second World War was opened.

The invasion of Soviet troops took the Polish command by surprise. Nobody understood what happened at first. What is it: the arrival of the allies or the invasion? However, the answer to this question was given by Soviet bombs and shells that fell on the Polish positions. The directive of the commander of the Polish troops, Marshal Rydz-Shmygły, also played its role, ordering not to engage in battle with the Red Army and withdraw to the territory of Romania and Hungary.

The vast majority of combat-ready units were aimed at hitting the Germans. The Red Army was resisted mainly by parts of the border guard corps. Nevertheless, major battles unfolded near Grodno, Shatsk and Oran. Near Przemyśl, two infantry regiments were completely cut down by the lancers of General Vladislav Anders. Timoshenko managed to bring tanks into action, preventing the breakthrough of the Polish cavalry into the territory of the USSR.

The heroic garrison of the Brest Fortress (!) under the command of General Konstantin Plisovsky repelled all of Guderian's attacks. Guderian was nervous. Krivoshein's heavy artillery came to the rescue, bombarding the fortress for two days continuously. Excited by the battle, the soldiers of Kovalev and Guderian hugged on the Tiraspol bridge across the Bug.

On the occasion of the glorious victory, a grandiose military parade took place in Brest. To the militant sounds of the Brandenburg March, Soviet and German soldiers were printing a step. Taking the parade, General Heinz Guderian and brigade commander Semyon Krivoshein stood side by side on the podium, whose heavy artillery brigade helped Guderian complete the task of capturing the Brest Fortress.

"Friendship sealed in blood!" - Stalin will say later in a telegram to Hitler, and whoever knows Stalin will understand how he hated his overly nimble competitor if he spoke to him about friendship.

The Red Army captured 240,000 Polish soldiers. Naturally, there was not enough transport, prisons and camps, so mass executions of prisoners of war immediately began. Mass graves - traces of our "liberation campaign" - were found near Grodno, in Oshmany, in Khodorovo, Molodechno, Sarny, Novogrudok, Rogatyn, Kossovo-Polesky, Volkovysk and many other places. Officially, their own losses were also announced: 737 killed, 1862 wounded. Total: 2599 people [11]. Triumph of the military

Stalin's doctrines - "little bloodshed in foreign territory."

Hitler, who was eager to make some nice gesture towards England, proposed the creation of a puppet Polish microstate on both sides of the demarcation line separating Soviet and German troops. However, Stalin immediately saw in this another cowardly attempt by Hitler to extricate himself from the war with the West.

On September 25, Schulenburg telegraphs to Berlin:

"Stalin declared: in the final settlement of the Polish question, everything should be avoided that in the future could cause a clash between Germany and the Soviet Union. From this point of view, he considers it wrong to leave an independent Polish state. He proposes the following solution: from the territories to the east of the demarcation line, the entire Lublin Voivodeship and the part of the Warsaw Voivodeship that extends to the Bug should be attached to our part. In return, we must renounce our claims to Lithuania..."

There was a quick reply from Berlin that the Fuehrer had changed his original opinion and considered Stalin's point of view more realistic. (Intelligence reported to him that the British did not want to listen to anything until the German troops retreated behind the line that existed before September 1. No puppet microstates would save the situation.)

On September 27, 1939, Pravda reported: "At the invitation of the government of the USSR, September 27 of this year. German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop is arriving in Moscow to discuss with the government of the USSR issues related to the events in Poland.

At 18.00 Ribbentrop's plane made a trip to the Moscow airport. Molotov met him like an old friend - he did not hug him for a little. However, when Ribbentrop arrived at the embassy, he was in for a small but not very pleasant surprise. Schulenburg handed his boss two telegrams. These were messages sent from Berlin by the German envoy in Tallinn, who said that the Estonian government had informed him of a Soviet ultimatum demanding "under the threat of an immediate invasion" to provide the USSR with naval and air bases on Estonian territory, as well as to station a Soviet military contingent there. fifty thousand people. A similar ultimatum was presented to the government of Latvia. The secret protocol, signed by Ribbentrop on August 23, began to operate.

In a somewhat preoccupied mood, the Reichsminister went to meet with Stalin. Stalin received his old friend very cordially. In violation of all protocols, negotiations immediately began at a banquet table laden with bottles. Hilger, an adviser to the German embassy (recruited by Soviet intelligence a long time ago), stunned by such a powerful triumph of Georgian hospitality over diplomatic protocol, was counting toasts. On the number 22, he lost his way, because he drank on a par with others.

Ribbentrop, completely drunk, after the banquet, went to the Bolshoi Theater for the last act of Swan Lake.

Stalin did not accompany his guest, as he was forced to personally take part in the processing of the stubborn Estonian delegation, eloquently explaining what awaits their small country if it dares to reject Moscow's ultimatum.

After taking a shower at the embassy and changing clothes, Ribbentrop returned to the Kremlin for the night talks. Hitler agreed with Stalin's plan to exchange Polish lands for Lithuania. "Hitler knows his business," Stalin remarked with satisfaction and, in a surge of generosity, presented Ribbentrop with a vast hunting ground in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, noting that Goering, known for his passion for hunting, would probably be most delighted with this gift.

In a relaxed atmosphere of friendly conversation and jokes, a new Soviet-German treaty was signed, called the Treaty of Friendship and Border. The treaty was short and consisted of only four articles:

"Article I. The government of the USSR and the German government establish as the boundary between mutual state interests in the territory of the former Polish state a line that is marked on the map attached to this and will be described in more detail in an additional protocol.

Article II Both parties recognize the boundary of mutual state interests established in Article I as final and eliminate any interference of third powers in this decision.

Article III. The necessary state reorganization in the territory to the west of the line indicated in the article is carried out by the German government, in the territory to the east of this line - by the government of the USSR.

Article IV The government of the USSR and the German government consider the above reorganization as a reliable foundation for the further development of friendly relations between their peoples.

On the secret map attached to the treaty, the demarcation line for the fourth partition of Poland was carefully drawn, with the amendments that Stalin personally made, ceding the hunting grounds to Ribbentrop. Accordingly, Stalin had to sign the map twice. For the second time, his dashing stroke from the territory of Western Belarus cut through Ukraine and left for Romania.

Before leaving Moscow, the touched Ribbentrop gave an interview to a TASS correspondent, noting the following points:

- "1. German-Soviet friendship is now finally established.
 2. Both sides will never allow third powers to interfere in Eastern European issues.
 3. Both states want peace to be restored and that England and France stop the absolutely senseless and hopeless struggle against Germany.
 4. If, however, warmongers prevail in these countries,
- then Germany and the USSR will know how to respond to it."

The Minister went on to point to the agreement reached yesterday between Germany and the USSR on an extensive economic program that would benefit both powers. Herr von Ribbentrop concluded by saying:

"The talks took place in a particularly friendly and excellent atmosphere. However

First of all, I would like to note the extremely cordial reception extended to me by the Soviet government, and especially by Messrs. Stalin and Molotov.

The wires were warm. Ribbentrop promised Stalin "to come again and stay longer." Stalin, on the other hand, was haunted by the young SS man Schulze. "Next time, come in uniform," Stalin cooed, hold the young man's hand in yours. The young man promised Stalin to do this without fail and fulfilled his promise on June 22, 1941!

Needless to say, Stalin was pleased. The lands included in the USSR as a result of the defeat and partition of Poland totaled about 200 thousand square meters. kilometers with a population of 13.4 million people.

The reduction of the newly acquired territories to the all-Union denominator began immediately. Local departments of the NKVD received a secret order from the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs No. 001223 dated October 11, 1939, according to which an urgent registration of "counter-revolutionary elements and enemy categories of the population" was to be organized, regardless of whether they participated in anti-Soviet activities. Quickly drawn up lists included not only former members of the Polish army, gendarmerie and police, but also employees of state institutions, public and religious figures, members of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Polish cultural and even sports societies. According to these lists, the mass deportation of the population to Siberia began. The number of deportees quickly exceeded one and a half million people. (The Germans lagged behind, having managed to evict only 462,820 people from their territory. This is understandable - they did not have Siberia [12]. It is not surprising that the "liberated half-brothers" immediately took up arms and fought the Soviet invaders right up to the end of the 50s until their leader Stepan Bandera was killed in Munich by KGB agents, and they themselves were almost completely exterminated, having lost more than 3.5 million people killed and tortured in Stalin's camps, counting only Western Ukrainians.

In Moscow, Stalin looks lovingly at the map of the division of Poland he has signed twice. The demarcation line of division was not created by chance. It was carefully thought out and drawn by Stalin and two of his favorite and, it must be admitted, the most capable General Staff officers Shaposhnikov and Meretskov.

The cession of part of the Polish lands of the Warsaw and Lublin Voivodeships to Hitler in exchange for Lithuania was not just a whim, but a carefully thought-out action. As a result, two ledges-balconies appeared on the map - Bialystok and Lvov, menacingly hanging over German territory and creating a threat of an instant encirclement of the Nazi troops east of the Oder and a swift, dagger strike on Berlin. And the acquisition (so far conditional) of Lithuania deprived the Germans of the opportunity to hang menacingly over our right flank as well.

"These ledges," Shaposhnikov, the commander of the 1st rank, allowed himself to remark, "will hang over Hitler like clouds." The leader carefully looked at his favorite and said: "And from these clouds will strike

Storm ". Maybe Stalin wanted to say "thunder will strike", but, apparently, not knowing the Russian language very well, he said exactly that - "thunderstorm will strike." After all, thunder is only part of a thunderstorm, so that Stalin, as always carefully weighing his words, this time knew what he was saying.

That's how I was born

Operation Thunderstorm, which Stalin had been thinking about since 1934. Its operational development began only in mid-October 1939. Needless to say, the operation was

completely secret. Its preamble was simple, like everything ingenious: taking advantage of Hitler's war with Western democracies, seize Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Turkish straits, and, if possible, Germany itself. For this purpose, render all possible assistance to Hitler in the fight against his powerful opponents, frustrating any attempts at a peaceful settlement of the outbreak of war. It was the first option.

I must say that for the time being, Stalin was not afraid of Germany at all, but was afraid of France. It is understandable - the leader was a man of his time and all his judgments were formed during the First World War. He was convinced that any "crusade" against the USSR would be led by France. That is why the first version of Operation Thunderstorm looks so truncated, since behind the Maginot Line was the French army, which Stalin considered the strongest in Europe. As soon as the French recapture the Ruhr, the leader pointed out, we must begin here too.

The Germans, bogged down in the defense of the Ruhr area, will be able to leave only negligible forces in the east. We are restoring order in Eastern Europe, seizing the rest of Poland and East Germany, uniting the French somewhere on the Elbe.

Initiated into the plan of the leader, and there were five of them - Molotov, Beria, Shaposhnikov, Meretskov and partially Zhdanov were enchantedly silent. As further versions of the Thunderstorm were developed, in connection with the rapidly changing situation in Europe, the list of persons initiated into it increased, but never exceeded thirty people. Subsequently, Zhukov, Mekhlis, Kirponos, Pavlov, Dekanozov and partly Malenkov and Timoshenko were initiated into the idea.

Stalin lived through Operation Thunderstorm.

Any of his steps in domestic and foreign policy in the period 1939-1941. impossible to understand correctly without taking into account "Thunderstorm". It has already been explained to us that Stalin was the greatest criminal, a ruthless and insidious despot. But for some reason no one is able to draw another simple conclusion

: Stalin was the most aggressive of all politicians of his time, only more insidious than Hitler or Not Mussolini. Both of the latter were highly adventurous. Stalin did not like adventures. He calculated everything carefully.

In the meantime, without wasting time, it is necessary to seize what was managed to negotiate with the Germans: the Baltic states and Finland. But also not impudently, but carefully so as not to irritate the world. However, if the Latvians and Estonians were relatively easy to impose "allied" treaties, the essence of which was the deployment of fifty thousand contingents of Soviet troops on their territory, the Lithuanians and Finns turned out to be more stubborn, frankly stating to Molotov that the "treaties" proposed by the Soviet Union were nothing more than occupation.

The Lithuanians were treated more cunningly. Having summoned Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbshis to Moscow, he was offered to include Vilnius and the Vilnius region, previously torn from Lithuania by Poland and captured by the Red Army during the "liberation" September campaign, into Lithuania. The second clause of the agreement was, again, Lithuania's consent to the deployment of Red Army garrisons in all key strategic centers of the republic, as well as the provision of naval and air bases to the USSR on its territory.

Knowing full well that the fate of his country had already been decided by the German-Soviet pact, Urbšys tried to use all his diplomatic skill to avoid occupation, and

yielded only under the direct threat of an immediate invasion. After that, Stalin did the Lithuanian minister a great honor, allowing him to watch his favorite film "Volga-Volga" in his personal cinema. However, Urbshis' stubbornness was not forgotten. The fourteen years that the former Foreign Minister had to spend in Soviet prisons and camps gave him enough time to think about his lack of respect during negotiations and about the negative review of Comrade Stalin's favorite film.

The Finns behaved even worse. They did not even want to hear about the "peaceful" Soviet proposals to send troops to Finnish territory to ensure their own security, brazenly declaring that they were able to do it themselves.

Stalin began to lose patience, and this never ended well for anyone. The Finns were offered a new option: they cede the Karelian Isthmus, the Aland Islands and the Hanko Peninsula to the USSR, and in return receive twice the territory in Soviet Karelia. However, the Finns again refused, apparently not assuming that back in June the headquarters of the Leningrad Military District had developed a plan for their occupation. Irritated, Stalin ordered to prepare for the invasion of Finland within a month.

A new term "White Finns" appeared in Soviet newspapers and stories about what a scoundrel the commander of the Finnish microarmy Mannerheim, who before the revolution dared to be a tsarist general, stole the banner of the Cavalier Guard regiment in which he served while fleeing Russia, and still has not shot himself from shame .

Soon in Paris, the creation of a Polish government-in-exile headed by General Sikorski was announced. It was generally funny, and therefore the Soviet government reacted to this joke of Western democracies with a feuilleton in Pravda on October 14, making it clear that it understands and appreciates humor. The author of the feuilleton Zaslavsky wrote:

"With full seriousness, although with difficulty hiding an ironic smile, the French press informed the world about the sensational news. In Paris, on some street, a new government of Poland was formed, headed by General Sikorsky. According to the message, the territory of the new government consists of six rooms, a bath and a toilet. In comparison with this territory, Monaco looks like a boundless empire.

In the main synagogue in Paris, Sikorsky gave a speech to Jewish bankers. The synagogue was decorated with a flag depicting a white eagle, which the chief rabbi had to declare kosher, since this bird, as is known, is not used by Orthodox Jews for food. In former Poland, the Polish aristocracy constantly threatened the Jews with death and pogroms, but the Jewish bankers in Paris, apparently, have nothing to fear from General Sikorsky ... "

From the meaning of the article, it could be concluded that only after the German occupation for the Jews came the time of national revival and complete prosperity.

But it was good for Stalin to frolic, honing the operational art of his general staff officers by planning Operation Thunderstorm, occupying the Baltic republics without firing a shot and mocking the Anglo-French and the aggressors with the help of newspaper feuilletons and cartoons. He himself enjoyed the state of "outside the war", into which he so deftly dragged his new friend Hitler.

But Hitler was not laughing. Remembering the Verdun and other meat grinders of the Western Front of the last war, he was nervous, probed the possibilities of a peaceful settlement, but in response only arrogant British memorandums were received that peace was impossible until the final "destruction of Hitlerism as an ideology." In addition, the war was going on, and if on land it really deserved the name "strange", then at sea it immediately took on a fierce

character.

A few hours before the start of the war, the largest German liner, the Bremen, once wearing the Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic, left New York. There were no passengers on board the ship. The ship's band played "Deutschland uber alles". The team lined up on deck chanted the words of the march-anthem in unison. The pale faces of the sailors spoke clearly of their understanding that they were going to certain death. There is no escape from the English on the high seas, and few knew this truth better than the Germans.

The Bremen left New York and disappeared without a trace. Detachments of English ships combed the ocean to intercept and destroy the Bremen. Indeed, in wartime, the owner of the "Blue Ribbon" with a displacement of 50 thousand tons could transfer entire armies to any distance at a 28-knot speed, being an invaluable vehicle for the Wehrmacht. But the huge liner seemed to have vanished into thin air. Newspapers caught the most incredible rumors: the Bremen was interned in Mexico, the crew sank the liner on the high seas - the circle from the Bremen was found on the coast of Massachusetts. "Bremen" broke into Italy.

But the reality turned out to be much more intriguing - the Bremen, having left New York, turned sharply to the north and, holding almost the edge of the pack ice, calmly came to Murmansk. On September 4, the prearranged signal "AO-13" was transmitted to all German ships in the Atlantic from Raeder's headquarters, which meant: "Proceed to Murmansk, adhering to the northern course as much as possible." The British expected anything, but not this, and missed 36 largest enemy transports that had taken refuge in the Kola Bay, among which were such world-famous passenger liners as New York, Schwaben, Stuttgart, Cordillera, "Saint Louis", a lot of timber trucks, tankers and high-speed refrigerators.

The Murmansk authorities, although they had been warned by Moscow, looked with amazement at dozens of ships under the Nazi flags suddenly appearing in our Arctic waters, over which the bulk of the Bremen reigned supreme.

The "particularly friendly atmosphere" that Ribbentrop noted when talking about his visit to Moscow immediately spread to Murmansk. The crews of all German ships were given the right to go ashore without hindrance, the sealed photos and film equipment were returned to their owners, and the powerful Bremen radio station was allowed to maintain constant contact with Germany.

In the Murmansk interclub, only German was heard, accordions were playing, militant German songs were sung.

These happy events coincided in time with the unexpected successes of the German submariners, whose excellent combat skills once again provided an objective lesson in the frivolous ease with which the British were accustomed to conduct themselves at sea.

On October 14, a German submarine under the command of Lieutenant Commander Prien penetrated the famous British base of Scapa Flow, where the entire Kaiser fleet was once flooded, and sank the British battleship Royal Oak with a torpedo salvo. The Royal Oak has collapsed! The shame of Scapa Flow has been avenged! The jubilant Hitler, with wet eyes from the flood of memories, personally laid the Knight's Cross on Prin.

On October 17, another German boat intercepted and sank the English aircraft carrier Coragers at sea. The tactics of anti-submarine defense worked out by the British back in the last war gave obvious failures. No one then, in wartime conditions, could ask the question: where did the boats come from, that they so easily managed to break through anti-submarine

frontiers in the deep rear of the English fleet.

In German operational documents, the mysterious name "Basis Nord" flashed by, without saying anything to anyone. Few people knew then, and even less know today, that a division of German submarines was deployed at the Soviet naval base in Zapadnaya Litsa, from where they could quickly and practically safely reach the most vulnerable communications of the British, especially since they were not expected at all from this direction. But they were still flowers.

On October 23, Murmansk residents could observe on the streets of the city the brave sailors of the German fleet, on whose peakless caps the name "Deutschland" burned in gold of Gothic letters. German surface raiders, it turns out, were allowed to bring their prizes to Murmansk. This time, the prize was the African refrigerator City of Flint, which caused a major international scandal that almost ended in a rupture of diplomatic relations between the USSR and the USA.

As early as October 16, immediately after Prin's sinking of the battleship Royal Oak, Raeder, in the presence of Jodl, reported to the Fuhrer on the exceptional importance of the Basis Nord point provided to him by the Russians on the Kola Peninsula and received Hitler's permission to expand the base. At the same time, a stream of a wide variety of goods poured into Germany from the Soviet Union, providing Nazi Germany with almost everything that she could dream of - from non-ferrous metals and fuel, wheat and cotton to the transit of strategic raw materials from Japan and China through Soviet territory: rubber, oils, precious woods, etc.

The British blockade, with which London hoped to strangle the Reich by the spring of 1940, turned out to be completely ineffective. Germany and its armed forces, so generously fed from the USSR, were gaining strength every day. Battleships were completed, the tank program expanded, ammunition and all kinds of strategic raw materials were accumulated, Stalin rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Only those historians who cannot or do not want to investigate the true reasons for such a policy of Stalin prefer to follow the line of least resistance, calling this policy the "criminal political myopia" of the leader of all peoples.

Of course, Stalin's disruption of the economic blockade of Germany, his rescue of the invaluable cargo tonnage of the German fleet, and, finally, the creation of a German naval base on Soviet soil - all this at first glance is difficult to explain. But only at first glance! All this was an integral part of Operation Thunderstorm: to prevent the British from winning a quick victory at sea, to make the war irreversible, to weaken England as much as possible by German hands, to allow the European war to flare up.

Hitler's withdrawal from the war could lead to an alliance of European powers and to that notorious "crusade" against the USSR, of the inevitability of which Stalin, convincing everyone, convinced himself. And Europe, occupied with the war, among other things, in Stalin's opinion, could not react in any way to "certain measures of a foreign policy nature" that Stalin had outlined for the near future. No matter what they say about Stalin, no one has ever dared to call him a naive simpleton. Of course, he was not well educated and at times got confused in complex international schemes, incorrectly simplifying them according to the primitive scheme of the Marxist-Leninist class approach.

But he always played his game and did not play along with anyone. And his game was absolutely obvious.

October 31, Molotov speaks at the extraordinary fifth session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with

report on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Clearly in shock, he gives a speech that is destined to outlive him for a long time, although he lived to be 93 years old. Reporting to the deputies on the division of Poland, Molotov, almost without using the turns of "new speech", with frankness unusual for a politician, says:

"The ruling circles of Poland boasted a lot about the "strength" of their state and the "power" of their army. However, a short blow against Poland, first by the German army and then by the Red Army, turned out to be enough to leave nothing of this ugly offspring of the Treaty of Versailles, which lived off the oppression of non-Polish nationalities. Further, Molotov attacks England and France as aggressors, passionately and clearly

explaining my point:

"..England and France, who yesterday still stood up against aggression, stand for the continuation of the war ... The attempts of the British and French governments to justify this new position of theirs by the obligations given to Poland, of course, are clearly untenable. The restoration of old Poland, as everyone understands, is out of the question. Therefore, it is pointless to continue the current war under the banner of the restoration of the former Polish state. Realizing this, the governments of Britain and France, however, do not want an end to the war and the restoration of peace, but are looking for a new justification for continuing the war against Germany. Recently, the ruling circles of England and France have been trying to portray themselves as fighters for the democratic rights of the peoples against Hitlerism, and the British government has declared that for it the aim of the war against Germany is nothing more and nothing less than the "destruction of Hitlerism." It turns out that the British, and with them the French supporters of the war, declared against Germany something like an "ideological war", reminiscent of the old religious wars.

But this kind of war has no justification for itself.

The ideology of Hitlerism, like any other ideological system, can be recognized or denied, this is a matter of political views. But any person will understand that ideology cannot be destroyed by force, it cannot be ended by war. Therefore, it is not only senseless, but also criminal to wage such a war as the war for the "destruction of Hitlerism" under the false flag of the struggle for "democracy".

Having thus characterized the foreign policy situation and clearly letting Germany know that she was not afraid of anything and continued her "just" cause, the head of the Soviet government and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs turned to domestic policy issues. After listing the rich trophies taken by the Red Army during the September campaign in Poland and emphasizing to the applause of the audience that "the territory that passed to the USSR is equal in size to the territory of a large European state," Molotov turned to the Baltic problem. Referring to the recent conclusion of mutual assistance pacts between the USSR and the three Baltic republics, Molotov, quickly switching to "new language", stated:

"The creation of Soviet bases and airfields on the territory of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the introduction of a certain number of Red Army units to protect these bases and airfields provide a reliable defense support not only for the Soviet Union, but also for the Baltic states themselves ... The special nature of these mutual assistance pacts does not at all mean any interference of the Soviet Union in the affairs of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as some organs of the foreign press are trying to portray ... "

The Anschluss of the Baltics has already been decided in the Kremlin, and although this is clear to almost everyone, Stalin is in no hurry to announce it. He is still afraid of the West and does not want to be drawn into the war on the side of Germany. This could derail the Thunderstorm operation he cherishes, which is based on free hands and the ability to strike at his own discretion. Bye

no one can be annoyed - neither Western countries, nor Hitler. Let them cling to each other. And the Baltic states itself will be asked to join the USSR, as the Transcaucasian republics and the Central Asian emirates once did. The technique has long been worked out, only the world, agitated by new events, forgot about it.

But open irritation begins to sound in Molotov's voice - he moves on to the ugly behavior of Finland, with which it was not possible to conclude a similar agreement, since the Finns refused the voluntary occupation of their small but proud country by the Soviet Union.

"Our relations with Finland are in a special position," Molotov says harshly. "This is mainly due to the fact that various kinds of external influences from third powers are more affecting in Finland."

He can hardly contain himself. Stubborn Finns disrupt the schedule of planned actions. In the meantime, there is still time for the Finns to change their minds. Recalling to the animation and laughter in the hall that the population of Leningrad is larger than the population of all of Finland, Molotov expressed sincere bewilderment: how, with such a balance of forces, Finland could behave so impudently. Well, good: if the Finns do not want to conclude a "mutually beneficial" agreement with us, this is their business. But they do not want to meet the more than modest claims of the Soviet Union, which only asks to cede to it half of the Finnish territory, and at the same time to disarm. Then Molotov, according to a well-established methodology, begins to list the demands of the Soviet Union by their furious denial:

"There is hardly any reason to dwell on those tales that are being spread by the foreign press about the proposals of the Soviet Union in negotiations with Finland. One claims that the USSR "demands" the city of Viipuri (Vyborg) and the northern part of Lake Ladoga. Let's say from ourselves - this is pure fiction and a lie. Others argue that the USSR "demands" the transfer of the Åland Islands to it. This is the same fiction and lie!"

Here Molotov is already speaking almost the truth. This is not about any territorial concessions on the part of the Finns, but about the capture of all of Finland in a very original way, which they intend to announce with the start of the invasion. An open threat against Finland is almost no longer hidden behind ornate turns of speech:

"After all this, we do not think that Finland will begin to look for a reason to disrupt the proposed agreement. This would not be in line with the policy of friendly Soviet-Finnish relations and, of course, would cause serious damage to Finland itself. We are sure that ... Finnish leaders will not succumb to any anti-Soviet pressure and incitement of anyone.

However, Molotov himself no longer believed that the Finns could be intimidated. "Apparently, we will have to fight with Finland," Stalin said, and he never wasted words. So it happened this time.

Chapter 3

On November 26, 1939, in the period from 15.45 to 16.05, seven shells exploded at the location of the Soviet military unit, located one kilometer northwest of the village of Mainila near the Finnish border (on the Vyborg highway). One junior commander and three Red Army soldiers were killed, eight people were wounded. Although the shelling began quite unexpectedly, many managed to notice that the shells were coming from the south, from their own rear.

However, the commission that arrived instantly (at 17.10), having examined the scene, came to the conclusion that the shelling was carried out from Finnish territory. The stunned soldiers responded confusedly, while the commanders quickly realized what they wanted from them. The questions were too leading [13].

On the same day, without even waiting for the results of a fictitious investigation of the incident, Molotov called the envoy of Finland A. Jeren-Koskinen, handed him a note from the USSR government about the provocative shelling of Soviet troops from the territory of Finland. The note blamed the Finnish government for the incident and demanded that Finnish troops be removed 20-25 kilometers from the border. In a response note, on November 27, the Finnish government stated that the Finnish border guards observed shell explosions and, based on the calculation of the speed of sound from seven shots, it could be concluded that the guns from which these shots were fired were at a distance of one and a half to two kilometers.

south-east of the place where the shells burst.

The Government of Finland proposed that "the frontier commissioners of both parties on the Karelian Isthmus be entrusted with jointly investigating this incident in accordance with the Convention on frontier commissioners concluded on September 24, 1928." The delicate Finns hinted that the incident was due to a "mistake" in the Red Army exercises. But any military man is well aware that shell fragments scatter in an ellipse extended in the direction of the projectile, so it is very easy to see where the fire was coming from. Naturally, Moscow did not want to hear anything about any investigation.

In a new note, on November 28, Molotov accused the Finnish government of "wanting to mislead public opinion and mock the victims of the shelling." He announced that the Soviet government "from this date considers itself free from the obligations assumed by virtue of the non-aggression pact ..." All Soviet political and trade representatives were recalled from Finland.

At dawn on November 30, 1939, an outfit consisting of fighters Gorbunov, Lebedev and Snisar came out from outpost No. 19 of the Sestroretsk detachment of the Leningrad border district to guard the State border. The squad leader was the squad leader Minenko. The outfit was sent to guard the railway bridge across the Sestra River near Beloostrov, the only bridge connecting the USSR and Finland. At 6 o'clock in the morning, the head of the outpost, Lieutenant Suslov, approached the border guards, reminding the soldiers of the order of the head of the Sestroretsk detachment, Major Andreev. Two hours of tedious waiting passed. At 07.55 Lieutenant Suslov coughed loudly. This was the signal to attack. The soldiers, throwing grenades on the run and shooting at the Finnish border guards, rushed to the bridge. After a short fight, the bridge was captured. Minenko managed to cut the wire leading to the explosives under the bridge. The whole operation took about three minutes. Tanks were already moving towards the bridge.

Exactly at 0800, the long-range guns of the forts of Kronstadt, together with the ships of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet, approached the Finnish coast and batteries of corps and divisional artillery, began shelling the territory of Finland. At the same time, in complete darkness, warships and landing transports approached the island of Suur-Saari (Gogland) in the center of the Gulf of Finland. At 0800, naval artillery began bombarding the island, under the cover of which the paratroopers launched an assault. At the same time, powerful formations of bombers began to bomb the residential areas of Helsinki, Kotka, Viipuri and other cities in Finland.

"Columns of fire and smoke, fires, panic among the enemies accompanied the raid of the Stalinist

falcons," the Krasnaya Zvezda newspaper will write about this war crime without a shadow of shame. And all over the territory of the USSR, "spontaneous rallies" are already making noise. "Let's strike mercilessly at the enemy!" - demanded by the workers of the Bolshevik plant in Leningrad. "We will answer fire with fire!" - Labor Moscow is raging. "Let's wipe the Finnish adventurers off the face of the earth! The fate of Beck and Mossitzky awaits them!" - the workers of Kyiv blaze with anger.

Such a reaction to the attack of a gigantic empire on a tiny country, better than any other example, shows that Russian society has already been reduced by Stalin's thoughtful policy to the state of a completely brainless herd, fit, in the apt expression of Kant, only for sacrifice. And it took place.

The world had not yet recovered from the shock caused by the attack of the world's largest country on one of the smallest, when Stalin impressed everyone even more by demonstrating a new, elegant way to turn the most monstrous aggression into something sublimely just. On the day of the invasion, i.e. On November 30, the Pravda newspaper published the "Appeal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland to the working people of Finland", which, allegedly on behalf of the Finnish communists, contained a call for the immediate overthrow of the "bankrupt government gang", "executioners of the people and their henchmen". True, the Appeal stipulated that its authors were against the immediate organization of Soviet power in Finland and its annexation to the USSR. So far, only some vague "democratic reforms" and the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact with the USSR have been proposed - the same pact that the USSR so persistently tried to impose on the Finns after clarifying spheres of influence with Mr. von Ribbentrop.

But that was only the beginning. The next day, December 1, with an intriguing detective reference to "radio interception", Pravda published a report that in the Finnish city of Terioki (Zelenogorsk), which had just been captured by the Red Army, a new government of "Democratic Finland" was formed, headed by an old Comintern Otto Kuusinen, who also took over the portfolio of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. No one knew who the other six ministers were, but no one cared. On the same day, the "head of the government", no longer a "comrade", but Mr. O. Kuusinen appealed, as it should be, to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with a request to recognize his government. M. I. Kalinin, of course, could not refuse his old friend and colleague. The next day, talks were held in Moscow between the "heads of government" of the USSR and Finland. All of their own gathered: Stalin, Kuusinen, Molotov, Zhdanov, Voroshilov, and without unnecessary delay signed an agreement on mutual assistance and friendship. Stalin gave Kuusinen 70 thousand square kilometers of Soviet Karelia with the entire population, and Kuusinen sold the Karelian Isthmus to Stalin for 120 million Finnish marks, the islands in the bay and part of the Sredny Rybachy Peninsula for 300 million marks. In addition, at a reasonable price, Kuusinen agreed to lease the Hanko peninsula.

The agreement with Kuusinen came into force from the moment of signing, but was subject to ratification. The exchange of instruments of ratification was to take place "as soon as possible in the capital of Finland - the city of Helsinki". However, there was no information that the Finnish people responded to the call of the Pravda newspaper and began to overthrow the hated government.

There was just the opposite information that all the Finns, as one, including the communists, took up arms to defend the freedom and independence of their homeland and repulse the arrogant and basely provoked invasion. And although such a reaction of the Finns did not frighten anyone in the Kremlin, causing only condescending smirks - wow, "growling mouse!" - she forced "Mr." Kuusinen to ask the USSR for "international assistance" in a special declaration.

"The legitimate Finnish government," said the Declaration, "invites the government

The USSR to provide the Finnish Democratic Republic with all necessary assistance by the forces of the Red Army" in order to overthrow the "gangster White Guard clique" that usurped power in Helsinki. In order to have someone to assist, an army hastily formed in Leningrad, hastily recruited from Karelians, Vepsians, Finns, etc.

The first corps of the people's army of Democratic Finland was named "Ingria". There is no time to sew a uniform for this corps, but a very original way out of the situation was found. From Bialystok, where the Polish military warehouses were captured, tens of thousands of sets of uniforms of the Polish army were urgently delivered to Leningrad. They wrangled the insignia, dressed up the "Ingrian" in this uniform, who, in famously broken "confederates", bravely marched through Leningrad ... and no one else heard about them.

Rallies roared across the country, at which "the collective farmers of Tataria, the shepherds of Kazakhstan and the cotton growers of Uzbekistan" demanded the overthrow of the "White Guard clique in Helsinki" and welcomed the "new, legitimate government of Democratic Finland."

Stalin planned a war with the Finns along the lines of the German "blitzkrieg" in Poland. But, alas, he did not have an ally who would help him by opening a second front. It didn't seem necessary. Six Soviet armies, numbering more than a million people, supported by tanks and artillery, having absolute superiority at sea and in the air, invaded a country whose army, with total mobilization, could not exceed three hundred thousand people and had practically no tanks or aircraft. One could not doubt a quick victory. But nothing of the sort happened.

The Red Army was immediately drawn into fierce battles, showing itself in them as a poorly trained and virtually uncontrollable crowd. In forty-degree frosts, the army began hostilities, having neither sheepskin coats, nor felt boots, nor skis, on which, by the way, no one knew how to walk. Mobile detachments of Finnish skiers, having blocked the few roads of the Karelian Isthmus with blockages and mines, quickly paralyzed the movement of a huge, uncontrollable crowd and, boldly maneuvering along the snowy impassability, began to exterminate the enemy.

The two advanced divisions of the Red Army advancing on Suvantojärvi, cut off from the rear, frozen in the snow, were already taken prisoner by the Finns in a deranged state from frostbite. In the Petrozavodsk direction, Soviet troops suffered terrible losses, but could not move forward even a meter.

It turned out that there is absolutely no interaction between the branches of the military. Armadas of Soviet aviation did not have any means of interaction with the ground forces at all and aimlessly plied the Finnish sky, unable to help their bleeding and freezing infantry. Conceived by the fleet, also without any connection with the ground forces, spectacular improvisations could not lead to anything good either. The ships tore their hulls against the ice of the Gulf of Finland, were blown up by mines, constantly losing artillery duels with incredibly well-aimed Finnish coastal batteries. With difficulty, the tugboats dragged the brand new cruiser "Kirov", beaten by Finnish shells, to Libau.

An incredible patriotic upsurge embraced all sectors of Finnish society. The trick, undertaken by Stalin with the help of his Comintern gang, led to completely opposite results. The working class of Finland, having learned about the "government" of Kuusinen, published a response, which, in part, said:

"The Finnish working class sincerely desires peace. But since the aggressors do not consider his will for peace, the working class of Finland has no alternative but to take up arms in

hands to fight the battle against aggression ... "

Former soldiers of the Red Guard - participants in the Finnish revolution of 1918 - collectively appealed to the Minister of Defense with a request to enroll them in the Finnish armed forces for a common rebuff to the enemy. The "spirit of the winter war" entered the history of small Finland forever as a synonym for the unity and heroism of the people in the struggle for their freedom and independence.

But it is unlikely that Finnish patriotism could shake anyone in the Kremlin. After all, Polish patriotism was no less. I was shocked by something else - the incredibly high combat training of the small Finnish army. The old Russian guard General Mannerheim - the general of the retinue of the last Russian Sovereign - knew his job. Finnish skiers dressed in camouflage coats rushed like ghosts through the forests of the Karelian Isthmus, sowing death, panic, superstitious rumors among the stunned soldiers of the Red Army. The Finnish artillery was incredibly accurate. Few members of the Finnish pilots, reinforced by Swedish and Norwegian volunteers, valiantly engaged in battle with the air armadas of "Stalin's falcons", constantly winning victories in air duels.

Finnish newsreels are shown in Stalin's personal cinema. The ruddy faces of Finnish skiers under the visors of ski caps. Suomi submachine guns around the neck. The whiteness of the snow and tall pines towering above the thickets of fir trees. From the thicket, raising their frostbitten hands, Russian boys with cropped hair come out with faces swollen from frostbite. They are in the same tunics - even without overcoats! - and in tarpaulin boots. They go and go. There are many of them - no less than a company. The Finns look at them with a mixture of pity and contempt. Stacks of Russian three-rulers. The Finns are dragging corpses into a heap. All without overcoats, in the same tunics. Why no overcoats?! They dropped their greatcoats before the attack, Comrade Stalin. Set everyone by name! Understand this mess! [14]

Such an unexpected course of hostilities is being watched with lively interest from Berlin, London and Stockholm, from Tokyo and Washington, from Paris and Istanbul.

Two weeks of the war have already passed, but the Red Army, despite its overwhelming superiority, has not yet managed everywhere to overcome the foreground separating the Soviet border from the Mannerheim Line. From the eastern direction, where an excellent option was created on the map with one dagger blow from Suomussalmi towards the Gulf of Bothnia to cut the territory of Finland in half and go to the rear of the Mannerheim line, it was not possible to advance a single step at all. The huge 9th Army under the command of General Vinogradov, supported by hundreds of tanks and aircraft, referring to the lack of roads, all grouped, regrouped, but could not overturn two

opposing Finnish divisions. General Vinogradov was made perfectly clear that if he did not complete his victorious offensive to the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia by December 21 - the sixtieth birthday of Comrade Stalin - then the great leader might doubt his boundless loyalty.

By this time, the Soviet Union had already been driven out of the League of Nations as an aggressor in disgrace. The sympathies of the whole world were on the side of Finland. Intelligence had long ago reported to Stalin that the British were preparing a landing in Norway in order to send their troops and aircraft to help the Finns.

But this was not the most important thing that worried Comrade Stalin. And he was worried that there was practically no war in the West. The Germans clearly did not want to bite into the Maginot Line, and the Allies into the Siegfried Line. They still remembered very well what such breakthroughs cost the advancing. Moreover, the parties, even if only for decency, almost did not shoot at each other.

Stalin's plan was frustrated, to the fulfillment of which he devoted all his energy and for the sake of

who was willing to sacrifice everything. There was a quite obvious counter-variant: Hitler negotiated with the West, and together they, taking advantage of the fact that Stalin was bogged down in the Finnish war, would strike, organize the very crusade that he had been so afraid of since the civil war. Lenin himself warned about the high probability of this campaign!

On November 8, the Fuhrer miraculously escaped death. On this day, according to tradition, Hitler met with veterans of his movement in the largest beer hall in Munich to mark the next anniversary of the famous "Beer Putsch" of 1923 - an unsuccessful attempt by the Nazis to seize power, which ended for Hitler himself in prison, where he, after spending more than a year, wrote his famous book *Mein Kampf*.

This time Hitler's speech was shorter than usual. Having attacked with furious attacks on England, which so lightheartedly ignited the European war and stubbornly does not want to change its mind, Hitler left the hall with his retinue at the beginning of the tenth evening, leaving the veterans to enjoy the impression of his speech. Twenty minutes after the Fuhrer's departure, a bomb exploded in the beer hall, planted in a column behind the podium. Seven people were killed and 63 were wounded. Officially, no one claimed responsibility for this terrorist act.

The Germans, of course, blamed British intelligence for everything. The British, in turn, said that the explosion was a provocation by the Gestapo, the purpose of which is quite obvious: to increase the popularity of Hitler, and at the same time to eliminate party veterans who were always grumbling about the fact that "Adolf had betrayed the labor movement."

While Pravda, playing along with Hitler, the wings of the British, Stalin himself was in thought. He personally tended to think that the explosion was "Comintern things" - a kind reminder of the "intershik" he had nurtured, that she was dissatisfied with the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and Hitler's policy "on the Jewish question." The handwriting is familiar. Such hooliganism could, of course, be committed by the German communists themselves, who openly consider Stalin a traitor. Stalin ordered a thorough investigation, as a result of which two dozen leaders of the Comintern were shot, and about one and a half thousand German communists who fled to the USSR at one time were captured and extradited to Hitler.

And as if all this was not enough, a new misfortune fell upon Hitler: on December 12, the British intercepted the German "pocket" battleship *Graf Spee* in the South Atlantic and, after a short battle, drove it to Montevideo. And although only two cruisers fought on the part of the British, the frightened Germans blew up their ship.

All this did nothing to raise Hitler's morale.

The British clearly made it clear that at sea, as always, they were the masters. German maritime trade ceased instantly, as in 1914. The English noose already cuts the throat, despite the flow of goods from the USSR. What if there was no flow? The Reich would have been finished by now.

In Moscow, Stalin looks sullenly at his old friend Voroshilov. The marshal shudders under the gaze of the leader. Where is the victory in Finland, in which Voroshilov, as illiterate as his patron, did not doubt at all? I was so sure that I didn't even count.

necessary to inform Shaposhnikov, who is on vacation, about the start of hostilities?!

Until recently, there were five marshals in the cadres of the Red Army. Three were shot so as not to be clever. There are two left. Stalin hints to Voroshilov that even two marshals is too much. One Budyonny is enough for him. Voroshilov breaks out in a cold sweat. Agitated and stuttering, he assures Stalin that by his anniversary - December 21 - the Finns will be finished, or at least a radical change will occur in the war.

The strictest directives are sent to the troops. The NachPURA Mekhlis personally travels to the Karelian Isthmus with the authority to execute anyone on the spot. In Leningrad, on the orders of Zhdanov, another part of the population is expelled from the city and a blackout is introduced to whip up military psychosis.

However, it is not possible to intimidate the Finns by introducing blackouts in Leningrad. They are, however, very few. Choking on our blood, they are slowly moving back towards the Mannerheim Line.

On the morning of December 13, after a fierce battle, the Soviet troops, having crossed the Taipalen-Yoki River, tried to break through the Mannerheim Line near Lake Ladoga on the move. Urged on by furious orders from Moscow, the troops rushed to the assault without preparation. "To break through the enemy's defense no later than December 20!" - hysterically demanded directives showered down with a stream.

On December 16, the morning twilight near the Finnish city of Suomussalmi was blown up by the thunder of powerful artillery preparation. The 9th Soviet Army went on the offensive, supported by units of the 8th Army, advancing from the area near the Finnish town of Kuhmoniemi. The task of the armies included: breaking through the Finnish defenses from the east, reaching the rear of the Mannerheim line, a simultaneous attack on a large Finnish railway center and the port of Oulu with access to the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, which would cut the territory of Finland in half. After two hours of artillery preparation, the infantry rushed forward, supported by hundreds of tanks. Tanks and infantry equally sank into impenetrable snow, but stubbornly rushed forward. Every square meter was mined by the enemy. Tanks and motor vehicles burned, corpses of people and horses froze on the roadside. The wounded did not have time to help, they died from frostbite. But there was no enemy - he disappeared into the forest, avoiding combat contact with the advancing armies.

On the Karelian Isthmus, battles were in full swing along the entire length of the Mannerheim Line. Wave after wave of Soviet infantry, supported by artillery fire and tanks, went on the assault. Wave after wave they fell into the snow, never to rise again. The dagger fire of the Finnish pillboxes mowed down everyone. But new and new ranks of the Red Army went on the attack. In thin overcoats, clutching grandfather's three-rulers in their hands, falling waist-deep into deep snow, being blown up by mines, they went and went to the Finnish pillboxes with that great sacrifice that only Russian people are capable of. For a whole week there was an assault on the Mannerheim Line, but apart from unimaginable losses, it did not give any results. It was not possible to break through or even wedge into the defense of the Finns in any sector. The army bled to death and rolled back to their original positions. And, as if that were not enough, terrible news came from the Karelian front - the Finns surrounded the 9th Army and part of the 8th Army. More than 50 thousand people turned out to be in the cauldron. It's impossible to get through to them. Their supplies are running out. In such terrible frosts, death or surrender will inevitably await them ...

Such was the gift for Stalin's 60th birthday, which was splendidly celebrated in Moscow on December 21st. The sixteen-page Pravda, published on this occasion, naturally, was all devoted to describing the great deeds of the greatest Leader. The newspaper opened with a huge article by Molotov "Stalin - the successor of Lenin's work."

This was followed by an equally voluminous article by Voroshilov "Stalin and the Creation of the Red Army." "Stalin is the great locomotive of history," lied Lazar Kaganovich, whose article was reprinted by almost all the central newspapers.

The choir was completed by Mikoyan, who titled his work very modestly - "Stalin is Lenin today." The title of Mikoyan's article was transferred to posters and became the slogan of the era - "Stalin is Lenin today!"

Prone to sentimentality, Hitler honored his Moscow friend with an unprecedented set of warm words:

"...Please accept my most sincere congratulations. At the same time, I wish you personally the very best health in the name of a happy future for the peoples of the friendly Soviet Union. Adolf Gitler".

While the hysteria of what timid historians would later call "Stalin's personality cult" was sweeping through the USSR, in Berlin, the chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff, General Halder, received in the silence of his office, hung with maps, the Soviet military attaché commander Purkaev. They had a lot to talk about.

For four months now, German troops had been hovering around the Maginot Line in indecision. The Red Army's attempt to break through the Mannerheim Line on the move ended in complete failure. Halder believed that if the Wehrmacht climbed the Maginot Line, the result would be the same. He remembered Verdun well.

Halder switches the conversation from the Maginot Line to the Mannerheim Line. Purkaev shrugs. The specifics of the area - no roads, forests, many lakes. This makes it impossible to use tanks with full efficiency. The commander chooses his words carefully. The Germans share intelligence with the Finns. The Mannerheim line, Purkaev continues, in the end - he chooses the right word - will be neutralized. Another concern.

The British made it clear that they were going to send an expeditionary force to help the Finns. They are going to do this through the territory of Norway, having previously captured the main ports of this country - Narvik, Tromsø, and maybe Oslo. If the British do this, Purkaev continues, it could have the most dire consequences. In particular, the route from Germany to Murmansk will be complicated, if not completely interrupted. In addition, Sweden and, of course, Denmark will be drawn into the British orbit. As a result, complications (Purkaev chooses his words carefully) will also begin in the Baltic - the delivery of iron ore from Sweden to Germany may be interrupted and, for the time being, uninterrupted supplies by sea from the USSR.

Purkaev is cunning. The Kremlin is afraid of something completely different. If the British land in Norway and their troops engage in battle with the Soviet units in Finland, whatever one may say, this means a war with England, which Stalin does not want at all for the time being.

In addition, taking into account Hitler's complete unwillingness to wage war with Western democracies, who can guarantee that at the first combat contact between British and Soviet troops in Finland, the British will not pull Hitler over to their side and the West will not start a united crusade against the USSR, about which Ilyich prophesied!

Halder glances at the map. German intelligence reports with increasing alarm about the very suspicious activity of the British around Norway.

Norway, of course, is a tidbit, especially its huge merchant fleet and gold reserves. If the British get it, then their noose will become completely unbearable. In Halder's safe there are already several folders of a preliminary study of the operation "Ubyung Weser" - the capture of Norway by an unexpected landing of sea and air assault forces. Purkaev knows this, and he also knows how afraid the German fleet is of this operation. After all, it inevitably means a clash with the British at sea. What Purkaev does not know is Hitler's fear that the British, having captured Norway and put pressure on Sweden, will pull Stalin over to their side and crush the Reich like a rotten egg from both sides.

Congratulating each other on the upcoming Christmas and Stalin's birthday, the generals part, full of new worries and doubts. Halder, in general terms, is well informed about the activities of Corps Commander Purkaev in Berlin.

An excellent staff officer and at the same time a professional Chekist who has served in the frontier units for many years, he knows his business and gives the Germans reasonable and balanced advice. It is strange that for some reason the forty-five-year-old commander is haunted by the laurels of the Polish captain Sosnowski - the famous Polish intelligence officer, who firmly believed that the best information is "bed", i.e. received from mistress secretaries of prominent party and military leaders of the Reich. The handsome Pole was very successful in this field, causing an unprecedented spy scandal in the history of Germany. Purkaev, apparently, decided to surpass the handsome lancer. He gladly sleeps with any young patriot girl that the Gestapo slips on him, but not for secret information, but just like that - for his own joy. The bewildered Gestapo is still diligently compiling an album of photographs of the amorous adventures of the Soviet military attache, not yet deciding what to do with him next ...

The year 1939 ends. In an ominous silence and strange inaction, the German and Anglo-French armies froze in the west. Silence also reigned along the Mannerheim Line. Soviet troops are waiting for reinforcements, licking their wounds, regrouping. In the snows of Karelia, the 9th Army, surrounded by the Finns, is fighting with its last strength. All attempts to break through to the cut off parts and release them lead to new huge losses, but they do not give any result. And finally, it becomes quite obvious that the 9th Army has been destroyed.

According to the most conservative estimates, more than 30 thousand people were killed and died of frostbite. About 10 thousand were missing. About two thousand were taken prisoner in a half-dead state. The Finns solemnly bury their soldiers who died in the "battle of Suomossalmi". All of them are known by name. There are 903 of them. Volleys of funeral fireworks thunder. The expanses of practically unprotected Soviet Karelia are open to the Finns.

But the strength of the small country is fading. The army is overworked. Despite the sympathies of the whole world, no one provides the Finns with effective assistance. The Germans cannot do this, bound by a friendship treaty with Moscow. The British give crumbs - 75 anti-tank guns, 200 machine guns and vague promises to come to the rescue.

If Stalin does not want to fight England at all, then the British do not want to fight Stalin either. Deep psychologists - they firmly believe in their forecast: in such a small area as Europe, there is no place for two such large predators as Hitler and Stalin - they will inevitably grapple with each other - this, the British are sure, is a matter of the near future. And then, with the feasible participation of the rest of the world, they themselves will destroy each other.

British intelligence still knows nothing about Operation Thunderstorm, but the Bialystok and Lvov balconies lovingly fashioned by Stalin speak for themselves. Too clearly both ski jumps are aimed at Berlin. They disturb Hitler. He is slow to attack

West, not daring to turn his back on his new friend, frozen in such an unambiguous pose. The General Staff reassure the Fuhrer. These "balconies," explains General Halder, can be seen as springboards, but they can also be seen as the trainer's head, thrust deep into the mouth of a lion - chik, and there is no head. Hitler looks at the general incredulously. - Do not worry, my Fuhrer, Halder explains, with the "high" operational art that the Red Army demonstrates in the war with the Finns, with those seas of blood with which it pays for every step of its offensive, we have nothing to worry about yet. Until spring, the Russians are stuck on the Karelian Isthmus - this is quite obvious. And there they will need time to recover from such an unexpectedly difficult war. Already, the Abwehr estimates the losses of the Russians at least a hundred thousand people. And the war is not only not over, but, one might say, has not yet begun ...

Commander Shaposhnikov, busy developing the Thunderstorm and terribly dissatisfied that the army is being used and bleeding in such an unnecessary war, dares to suggest to Stalin: since the demonstration of power and blitzkrieg did not work, maybe we'll end here? And on the lessons of this war, we will reform the armed forces. After all, more important things are coming, Comrade Stalin. Where is this Finland going? She then asked to join the USSR. In amazement, Stalin takes the pipe out of his mouth. Voroshilov and Meretskov, drenched in sweat, look with horror at Shaposhnikov. No, the leader smiles wryly, to leave with a beaten muzzle? No, you have to win! Attempts to take the Mannerheim line with a bang! have been discontinued. Serious preparations began for the offensive. New divisions and corps, tanks and artillery were brought in from all regions of the country. On the Karelian Isthmus, in addition to the 7th Army, another one was deployed - the 13th. The total number of troops concentrated against Finland was already almost equal to the population of this country. So much artillery was brought in that there was not enough space for it on the Karelian Isthmus - the guns stood wheel to wheel. Almost all combat-ready aviation was concentrated on the airfields of the LVO. The ships of the Baltic Fleet, immeasurably superior to the naval forces of the Finns, had to add their artillery power to the cause of the speedy defeat of the enemy.

The soldiers, finally, were dressed in sheepskin coats and felt boots, delivered ointments for frostbite, introduced vodka allowances - the so-called "People's Commissar's hundred grams." Serious preparations began to break through the Mannerheim Line.

Organizationally, the troops were brought together in the newly formed North-Western Front, commanded by the commander of the 1st rank Timoshenko, a man without any military education, who liked Stalin during the civil war with his physical strength, ruthlessness and stupidity. Under his leadership, they began to develop an operational breakthrough plan. However, the operational art of Commander Tymoshenko did not provide for anything new. The Mannerheim Line was to be stormed head-on.

As the Stalinist military machine stalled more and more on the Karelian Isthmus, relations between the USSR and France and England became more and more hostile. Congratulating its readers on the New Year, the Pravda newspaper of January 1, 1940 happily noted in an editorial:

"All the honest sons and daughters of England, France and America stigmatize the vile gang - from the Pope to the London shopkeepers, who raised all this wild howl about the noble help that the Red Army is giving to the Finnish people fighting against their oppressors."

A swarm of political instructors from GlavPUR, who rushed to the front after his boss Mehlis,

explained to the fighters and commanders that Finland had treacherously attacked the USSR, that this war was "international imperialism's reconnaissance in battle" before the invasion of the USSR. It was no longer terrible that this shameful war was written and said in such terms, but that they believed in all this, and believed in fact unconditionally.

But Stalin is nervous. Intelligence reports clearly show him how the public opinion of England, France and the Scandinavian countries reacted to his Finnish adventure. There is constant information about ongoing secret Anglo-German contacts, where the possibility of a joint action against the USSR is being discussed. In Oslo, the British residency is conducting secret negotiations with the government of Norway for the passage of Anglo-French troops through its territory. And that means war with England. Don't want to at all. We are not yet ready to fight England. Everyone is complaining about the lack of workers. He, Stalin, starting from 1937, gave the order to send one and a half million people to the Gulag annually, distributing them in accordance with the needs of the people's commissariats. Where are these people? Who organized their pestilence and general executions last year?

I signed a distribution order for the next year - 1,700,000 people in the Gulag and not to release anyone. Well, how can anyone - and who is running out of time? Give new ones. No, that's not good, Comrade Stalin, a little, but you need to release. And give the second terms already at will. It's nice when you can argue like a Bolshevik, on principle, as only Lenin did.

And so he, Stalin, is alone, like Lenin. No one understands him correctly, everyone has to explain everything hundreds of times, especially on issues that are not supposed to be spoken directly at all. And the head buzzes and swells from the need to correctly analyze the incoming data. Where is the information, and where is the disinformation slipped by international imperialism?!

Here, Purkaev reports from Berlin that German intelligence received information about the upcoming British landing in Norway. The same information is given by our intelligence in Germany, but it warns that this is "disinformation" that came from England. Soviet intelligence in England also indicates that rumors about the upcoming landing of the British are constantly circulating in circles close to Whitehall.

If the British themselves spread disinformation about their landing, then why? Involve the Scandinavian countries in the war? But on which side? Of course, it is very important here that the British do not end up in Norway in any way. We need to cut them off from Finland. But how to do that? By ourselves - no way. The Germans could try, but it could be very bad for them.
run out.

On January 17, Pravda burst into a huge article about the insidious plans of England and France to violate the neutrality of Norway and Sweden in the most "vile" way.

It is impossible to say that this article was sucked from the finger. Soviet intelligence obtained a copy of the report of the French commander-in-chief, General Gamelin, to the government on the importance of creating a new theater of operations in Scandinavia.

At the same time, Hitler discovers on his desktop a reissued pamphlet by Kaiser Vice-Admiral Wolfgang Wegener "Naval Strategy in the World War", from which it is clear that Germany lost the first world war only because it did not occupy Norway .

Hitler himself can no longer figure out who is pushing him all the time towards Norway.

Maybe we should really get ahead of the British. The main thing is suddenness. The tiny (145,000 people) and poorly armed Norwegian army, of course, will not be able to threaten the Wehrmacht in any way. But the English?

While Hitler was tormented by doubts, his favorite Rosenberg - a graduate of the St. "National Union", a semi-underground organization that dreams of totalitarianism. What Rosenberg does not know is that his "old acquaintance" - a former major in the Norwegian army Vidkun Quisling - was recruited by Soviet intelligence while he was still his Norwegian military attache in Moscow.

Quisling greatly exaggerated the capabilities of his organization, but he lied with inspiration, as ordered. Hitler listened attentively to Quisling, but told the former major that for him, Hitler, the neutral position of Norway, as well as all of Scandinavia, would be most desirable.

On the same day, Hitler conferred with Raeder. It turns out that the Russians were allowed to concentrate part of the landing forces in Murmansk. Oh, this completely changes things. Here the British will not be able to react. Hitler immediately gives the directive to prepare for the capture of Norway. Stalin liked him because he swallowed the bait with the frivolous swiftness of a hungry perch.

On February 3, four days late, the headquarters of the Northwestern Front, Commander Timoshenko, presented Stalin with a new plan to break through the Mannerheim Line.

In principle, the new plan was no different from the old one. Finnish fortifications were supposed to be stormed by a frontal attack.

On the same day, after a powerful artillery preparation and air bombardment, the 7th and 13th armies, with their adjacent flanks, like a herd of buffaloes, went head-on to the Mannerheim line. The Red Infantry was supported, for the first time in the practice of the Red Army, by large tank formations. Using overwhelming superiority in people and equipment, the Soviet troops tried to break through the Finnish defenses with continuous attacks for three days. But everything was in vain - all attacks were broken against the unshakable stamina of the Finns. Wave after wave, as in December, the chains of the attackers bevelled, gasoline tanks burned like torches.

Already desperate, Timoshenko and Zhdanov, assigned to him, wanted to test combat gases on the Mannerheim Line, and only the ugly state of anti-chemical protection in the Red Army forced them to suppress this temptation. With ruthless orders, they continued to drive more and more masses of Russian infantry to the fortifications of the Finns. Artillery roared incessantly. Bombers rose, trying to clear the way

infantry.

Finally, after four days of bloody fighting, having suffered huge losses, our army broke through the first strip of the Mannerheim Line in two sectors. But it was not possible to wedge into the second line of the Finnish defense on the move. The bloodless army stopped again, taking a deep breath.

So it was in the center on the Vyborg direction. On the flanks, on the Kegsholm and Antreai directions, three Soviet divisions were completely destroyed, but not a single step could be advanced.

On February 11, Timoshenko threw a new mountain of cannon fodder at the weakening Finns, which

began to bite into the second line of defense. Part of the troops, having passed through the fire of the Finnish batteries in forty-degree frost, on the ice of the bay, went to the rear of the third line of defense. Timoshenko was in a hurry. Stalin's order was to take Helsinki no later than mid-March.

On February 16, the German transport Altmark, which served as a supply ship for the Graf Spee, who died in the South Atlantic, tried to return to the Vaterland, breaking through the English blockade under the cover of polar night. The Altmark had a whole Abwehr department with the latest radio equipment and a whole library of various secret documents, including cipher books, which the Germans traditionally treated with strange frivolity.

The Altmark sailed without fire through Norwegian territorial waters, where it was intercepted by two British destroyers.

The British raised the proud flag of their homeland on the Altmark and towed the transport to Plymouth along with the Abwehr secret library.

Meanwhile, the Soviet troops continued to bite into the reinforced concrete defense of the Finns, suffering terrible losses. It was not possible to expand the breakthrough in the central direction.

On the coast of Lake Ladoga, the divisions that had broken through the first line of Finnish defense were surrounded and methodically destroyed. The units that went through the ice of the bay to the rear of the Finnish defense got stuck in impenetrable snow and lost strength in battles for every meter of territory.

But the forces became more and more unequal. From all corners of the Soviet Union, trains were carrying to the front more and more thousands of tons of cannon fodder, which were immediately thrown into the meat grinder of battles. The Finns, realizing that their strength was running out, in desperation sought help from the world that sympathized with them so much. But there was no real help.

Blood brothers - Swedes and Norwegians - were horrified at the prospect of being embroiled in a war with the CCCP. The British assured that the Finnish question would soon become the "object" of careful study by the military cabinet, but just as carefully avoided direct answers, advising in private to try to achieve peace with Stalin. The same advice was given by the Swedes.

Back in early January, the Finns tried to start negotiations with the USSR on a possible conclusion of peace. With the blessing of the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tanner, the famous Finnish writer Hella Vuolijoki went to Stockholm, where she held secret negotiations with "Madame" Kollontai for two months, but to no avail.

The meat grinder continues on the Karelian Isthmus. On February 28, the Red Army in the central sector of the front breaks through the third lane of the Finnish defense, leaving advanced units to Vyborg.

On March 1, an attempt is made to take the city by storm on the move. The attempt ends with the encirclement and defeat of the 18th division of the Red Army. The troops stop and again wait for reinforcements. On March 6, Soviet troops again stormed and were again driven back with heavy losses. Timoshenko makes an attempt to surround Vyborg. Troops that have made their way through the ice of the bay are reaching the southern coast of Finland with the task of cutting the Vyborg-Helsinki railway. No one returned from this landing - everyone was destroyed by the Finns.

It was also not possible to bypass Vyborg on the right. Having blown up the locks of the Saimaa Canal, the Finns flooded the entire area around the city. Chest-deep in icy water, mowed down by Finnish machine guns, the Red Army soldiers continued to sacrifice themselves for the glory of political adventurers who had settled in the Kremlin ...

The denouement came soon. On February 7, the English naval attaché in Moscow, Vice Admiral Leopold Siemens, asked for an appointment with Admiral Kuznetsov, People's Commissar for the Navy. The admirals talked about the weather in Moscow, finding the winter quite severe. Then the Englishman launched into memories of the First World War, remembering, in particular, the flotilla of English submarines that fought in the Baltic in a military alliance with the Russian fleet. Kuznetsov remembered this event very vaguely. He knew much better about the raid of British torpedo boats on Kronstadt in 1919, when two Soviet battleships and a floating base of boats were sunk. Yes, agreed the Englishman, everything happened.

Nevertheless, he continued, he really likes Moscow, and he is very sorry that he, apparently, will soon have to leave the capital of Russia. "Are you called back?" – asked the drug addict. Siemens paused, and then, looking straight into Kuznetsov's eyes, replied that not only he, but the entire staff of the embassy would soon be recalled.

Agitated by such a strange and off-the-record behavior of the English attaché, Admiral Kuznetsov immediately reported the conversation to Stalin. However, Stalin knew much more than Kuznetsov. On his desk lay a report from the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, who had been summoned to the Foreign Office the day before and handed a note stating that "His Majesty's Government, closely watching the actions of the Soviet Union in Finland, expresses the hope that the USSR will have enough goodwill, to resolve the protracted conflict at the negotiating table and stop the senseless bloodshed ... "

The note ended with a very ornate phrase, the meaning of which, however, was quite clear:

"His Majesty's Government sincerely hopes that the Soviet Union will not allow the Soviet-Finnish conflict to escalate into a war of a much larger scale with the involvement of third countries."

At the same time, a documentary film was planted on the Soviet side through intelligence, telling about the harsh everyday life of distant English garrisons scattered on countless bases of the vast empire. The film was immediately played in Stalin's personal cinema. In addition to Stalin, only Poskrebyshev was allowed to view, although, at first glance, there was nothing special in the film.

It opened with the sounds of the march "Rule Britannia by the seas!" The superstructures and masts of English battleships floated across the screen, adorned with flags during some regular royal revue at Spithead. Princesses of the royal house, smiling, shaking hands with enthusiastic sailors.

Stalin frowns: why did they send him these shots to raise the morale of housewives? But here the plot changes dramatically. Instead of the water surface of the Spithead raid - sand dunes, cacti, thorns, a couple of grazing camels. Wire fence. The device crawls along it and shows a close-up of the gate with the inscription: "Royal Air Force Base at Masoula, Iraq." Sentinels in flat English helmets with rifles. Wellington heavy bombers are warming up their engines. Smiling guys hang half-ton bombs in bomb bays. An announcer suggests behind the scenes that each Wellington is capable of carrying three of these bombs over long distances, up to 3,000 miles. The animation shows the path of the bombers with a dotted line. Stalin clenched the handle of the pipe with his teeth. Baku! Here in

what's up! Either you stop your troops in Finland, or we bomb Baku! You are left without oil and at war with us, the British.

In clouds of sandy dust, Wellingtons rise into the air. But Stalin is no longer watching. He orders the light to be turned on and begins filling his pipe with tobacco...

The command of the North-Western Front is shocked: Stalin orders the troops to be stopped. Timoshenko believes that his mediocrity, his inability to take Vyborg is to blame for this! He humiliated the great leader, forcing him into peace negotiations with an insignificant enemy. What will happen to him now? Having completely lost his head, instead of ordering a ceasefire, he orders another assault on Vyborg.

On March 11, a Finnish delegation consisting of Deputy Foreign Minister Ruti, a member of the Finnish Diet Paasikivi and General Wilden arrives in Moscow, and the next day, March 12, a peace treaty is signed. On the Soviet side, it is signed by Molotov, Zhdanov and commander Vasilevsky.

According to the new treaty, the entire Karelian Isthmus, including Vyborg, departed to the USSR. The border was returned to the line determined by the Treaty of Nystadt in 1721 in the glorious times of Peter the Great. In addition, the USSR received a number of islands in the Gulf of Finland, the Finnish parts of the Rybachy and Sredny peninsulas, and the Petsamo region. But what about the "government" of Otto Kuusinen? Nobody remembered him anymore, as if he did not exist.

So the contract was signed. Starting at four o'clock in the morning, the Soviet radio, contrary to the usual night silence, hourly transmitted the text of the treaty. At the same time, Stalin, having contacted the command of the North-Western Front by telephone, swearing, demanded that Timoshenko and Meretskov take Vyborg at any cost. There was still time: according to the protocol attached to the treaty, hostilities were to be stopped on March 13 at 12.00.

At 6 o'clock in the morning, knowing about the signing of the peace, the Red Army went to storm the city, which, under Article II of the treaty, had already gone to the USSR. For six hours there was a bloody fierce battle. The blow was delivered from the side of the old cemetery through the railway station. Despite the huge concentration of manpower and equipment, it was not possible to take Vyborg. Exactly at 12.00, as stipulated by the agreement, the parties ceased fire. The Finns began to retreat. So Stalin avenged the humiliation to which the British subjected him: in six hours of battle, another 862 Red Army soldiers were lost. Don't annoy the leader!

But Stalin was not just annoyed, he was shocked. And the point was not that on the battlefields of the Finnish War, the Soviet Union vividly demonstrated the complete mediocrity of the military leadership, the complete helplessness of the army in solving elementary operational-tactical tasks. It was not even a matter of nightmarish losses and not that the USSR had lost the remnants of its international prestige, but that Stalin realized with horror that it was impossible to carry out Operation Thunderstorm with such an army. Not to fat - to be alive! [15]

The leader's life doctors stated that the leader had a pre-infarction condition. They asked the leader to stop his immoderate smoking and rest for at least two weeks. Stalin shrugged it off grimly. No no! Not now. It is necessary to completely reform the army.

He drives his favorite Voroshilov from the post of People's Commissar of Defense and appoints Timoshenko in his place. Stalin liked how Timoshenko tore the Mannerheim line, filling it with corpses. Decisive person. You can work with this! Instead of the expected execution, Timoshenko receives the title of Marshal and Hero of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 4

Timoshenko was summoned to an urgent meeting of the Politburo, where Stalin announced his new appointment. According to the leader, his friend Voroshilov lacked firmness, the excess of which he noticed in Timoshenko.

Glancing briefly at the summary of losses, Stalin did not find them excessive. Wrong selection of personnel and poor discipline - that, according to Stalin, was the reason for the failures in the war. Tymoshenko should have urgently paid attention to these two issues. But, in the end, the leader summed up, we achieved our goal, because we ensured the security of our northern borders and, first of all, Leningrad [16].

Such inspiring results of the war were hidden not only from the public, but also from the army. Newspapers did not actually cover the course of hostilities, concentrating their attention on heroic episodes - true and fictional - associated with individual soldiers or pilots. At times, lists of the awardees were published, occupying the entire newspaper. This was followed by short reports about the "victory" on the Mannerheim Line, and then an unexpected message about the conclusion of peace. There was also an exchange of prisoners of war. 986 Finnish prisoners were transferred to their homeland through a checkpoint north of Vyborg. Soviet prisoners - emaciated, frostbitten disabled - were taken home on hospital trains, to which no one was allowed. Some of them were unloaded at the Finlyandsky railway station in Leningrad and late at night they marched to the Moscow railway station, from where freight trains sent them forever into the irrevocable labyrinths of the Gulag. Nobody returned home. During 1940, their families were also expelled from large cities [17].

However, this was not what worried Comrade Stalin. His vindictive heart burned with the insult inflicted by the British, and, stroking his mustache, the leader was preparing cruel revenge on the insidious Albion, naturally, by the hands of the romantic Hitler. March 30 Molotov, speaking at the Supreme Council, attacks the Anglo-French with much more ardor than before.

He has every reason to be furious. The pro-Hitler policy of the USSR led to the fact that the patience of even the benevolent Frenchmen burst. The French communists, zealously carrying out orders from Moscow to support "Hitler's just cause", have already begun to openly corrupt the army and workers. Their activities were conducted by the Soviet embassy in Paris, also not in the least embarrassed by their diplomatic status. In wartime conditions, the French government was forced to take decisive measures in order to prevent the complete disintegration of the front and rear. The activity of the Communist Party in the country was banned, a number of Communists were arrested. The police carried out searches in the trade representation of the USSR and in a number of other premises belonging to various Soviet organizations. As a result, the cap caught fire on the most Soviet after Yakov Suritsa, who had to be urgently recalled.

Things were no better in London, where Ivan Maisky, in his own words, was shied away, "as if from a plague patient." Maisky had already warned Moscow several times that the British were waiting for any careless word from him in order to send him out of the country without any ceremony.

Knowing full well that only the inevitable prospect of a war with England forced Stalin to make peace with Finland, Molotov, intoxicated by his own lies, enthusiastically tells the deputies what a blow the Soviet Union's conclusion of peace with Finland was for Chamberlain. Apparently, the British hoped that the Finns would occupy the USSR at least as far as the Urals. But it didn't work, gentlemen! With one word "England" or "English" Molotov, that

completely uncharacteristic for him, breaks into threats, takes out a neatly folded handkerchief, wipes the corners of his lips. Drinks water. He knows what kind of booty the British pulled straight out of the mouth of the Soviet Union. But the great Stalin is not one of those people who can be humiliated with impunity.

Moscow has already received information about the upcoming landing of German troops in Norway. Realizing the risk associated with an amphibious landing in waters swarming with warships of the British fleet, the Germans asked Stalin (according to another version, Stalin himself suggested) to place part of the landing forces and support forces in Murmansk. Under the cover of snow charges of the February night in the Kola Bay, the bottoms of military transports full of soldiers and the largest Kriegsmarine tanker "Jan Wellem" were concentrated. According to the planners of the operation "Weser exercises", the appearance of this amphibious echelon from the direction, which the British do not suspect, should guarantee the success of the operation. The English will get a good lesson. In addition, it's time to deal with the annoying British air base in Mosul - this sword of Damocles hanging over the Soviet oil fields in Baku. Whatever happens, the British immediately remember this Achilles' heel of the USSR. But how to reach Iraq? The Germans do not yet have a plane capable of reaching Mosul. Stalin consults intelligence: is it possible to do something along the lines of the national liberation movement of the colonial peoples in the struggle against the imperialist oppressors?

Soviet intelligence is going through a difficult time. And Stalin, by way of self-criticism, cannot but admit that there is also his fault. Even Lenin, with his characteristic genius foresight, divided Soviet intelligence into three approximately equal parts: intelligence of the Comintern, intelligence of the Cheka-GPU and intelligence of the General Staff of the Red Army, or GRU. Ilyich believed that the actions of these intelligence services, as well as the inevitable antagonism between them, would become the cornerstones on which the foundation of the proletarian state rested unshakably. Watching each other jealously, intelligence agencies will prevent even the theoretical possibility of any of them slipping into a conspiracy against the dictatorship of the proletariat, even if this dictatorship is reduced to the dictatorship of the proletarian leaders. Fully agreeing with Lenin in principle, Stalin nevertheless had his own point of view here. The Comintern did not like the leader, because he considered this organization one of the instruments of the worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Until the end of his days, he could not really understand: who invented whom - Lenin's Comintern or Lenin's Comintern.

The constantly growing fat OGPU-NKVD gradually crushed all the intelligence structures of the Comintern, but the attempt of Menzhinsky and Yagoda to swallow the GRU at the same time was suppressed in the most decisive way. The grateful GRU was the first to shed light on the monstrous conspiracy that had matured in the bowels of the GPU and became known under the name of Operation Trust. The vengeful NKVD did not remain in debt and, in the wake of the so-called Tukhachevsky case, literally smeared the GRU on the wall.

In the bustle of "organizational measures" in 1937-1938. the leadership of both intelligence organizations fell into the hands of Yezhov, which Stalin, in the purifying frenzy of those heroic days of the "socialist renaissance", initially overlooked. Yezhov, unequivocally understanding his lofty mission, began to withdraw intelligence officers from all over the world and immediately put them against the wall. In response, the scouts began to en masse surrender to Western counterintelligence wherever they could. The famous Soviet resident Krivitsky rushed around the United States in search of at least some analogue of the secret police, to whom he could surrender, but not finding one, he eventually surrendered ... to Life magazine.

The revelations made on the pages of the Western press by the fleeing Soviet residents and diplomats, including Stalin's own secretary, also, fortunately, no one

heard, and whoever heard, he did not believe: painfully incredible things were told by the "proletarian" deserter fighters.

Having simultaneously become the head of the NKVD and the GRU, Yezhov, in the fair opinion of many historians, could not even theoretically remain alive, although for some reason he himself did not understand this. However, the liquidation of Yezhov was only a minor "organizational issue", the solution of which made it impossible to restore the practically defeated intelligence service. Many connections and channels were interrupted, many became so clogged that it was no longer clear which intelligence they belonged to. Old sources of information turned out to be quietly recruited, and new sources seemed suspicious. The leader completely lost confidence in intelligence and used it as an advisory body without the right to vote.

And then such a simple matter as the damned English airfield in Iraq suddenly turned into a problem. After the flight to the West of the Soviet Middle Eastern resident Agabekov, affairs in this region were in a state of complete neglect. According to the documents, it was possible to establish that Agabekov had a certain Ali Rashid Galyani on his salary - one of the viziers of the divan created under the regency council after the death of Emir Faisal. There was, however, a fear that Ali Rashid, while he was "ownerless", was outbid by the Germans. But whatever it was, he is known for his sharp anti-English sentiments. It would be necessary to plant weapons on him through Iran and ask our German friends for assistance. If the Soviet-German friendship at sea flourished on the Kola Peninsula, then on land it flourished along the lines of the Gestapo-NKVD, and related "offices" had already formed the "Friendship Society" and did not refuse each other small services and favors. The Germans, who were also not very pleased with the British air base 60 km from Baghdad, firmly promised to help. Stalin was touched.

In order to somehow smooth out the miserable impression that the Stalinist army left during the winter war, a number of spectacular and noisy events were thought out. On April 4, the deputies of the Supreme Council approved the new military budget. The next day, Pravda gleefully reported in an editorial:

"The Supreme Soviet approved the state budget of the USSR for 1940. With the greatest enthusiasm, the delegates voted for a major increase in our defense spending. Our country must have a more powerful Red Army and Navy in order to cool the ardor of the warmongers. Fifty-seven billion rubles, which will be spent on strengthening our defense, will help the Red Army and Navy solve any problems related to the security of our state.

57 billion rubles, of course, was a fake figure. Almost the entire state budget, directly or indirectly, was spent on military needs. A tank program, unprecedented in the world, was unfolding. The new diesel tanks T-34 and KB had no analogue in any army in the world. The conveyor was carrying new models of bomber and fighter aircraft. At top secret test sites, the latest rocket launchers were tested. Increased chemical and bacteriological ammunition. In the roar of riveting hammers and flashes of electric welding, new warships rose on the stocks. Submarines were conveyed from the factories. In Nikolaev, the giant hull of the newest battleship Sovetskaya Ukraina was already rising under the upper deck. The battleship Sovetskaya Belorussia was laid down in Molotovsk.

The newly appointed people's commissar of defense, Semyon Timoshenko, surveying the Voroshilov-Yezhov inheritance he had inherited, gave his first and most famous order for

No. 120, which said: "Teach the troops only what is needed in the war, and only as it is done in the war!" But that was easier said than done. In principle, due to the low equipment of the armed forces with vehicles, the new system of combat training was mainly reduced to exhausting infantry marches, with the masses of which they wanted to conquer the whole world. In the spring thaw, in the summer heat and winter cold, the infantry was exhausted by forced marches, requiring daily marches of up to 100 kilometers instead of the authorized 45.

"Without good infantry," Tymoshenko said at a meeting of district commanders, "you won't achieve victory in a modern war. You need to have excellent infantry not in words, but in deeds.

Who came up with this - Timoshenko himself or Stalin prompted him - is unknown, but the results immediately began to affect. All new replenishment was driven into the infantry. The formation of tank-mechanized corps slowed down sharply. Some tank corps were reorganized into infantry. With a huge shortage of personnel were aviation, artillery, engineering troops.

While Timoshenko was carrying out military reforms in the Soviet Union, feverish preparations were underway in Germany for a landing in Norway. The Soviet Union, knowing as an accomplice all the details of the upcoming operation, waited with bated breath. The British, apparently, knew about everything even better because they read the German codes freely, like boulevard novels [18].

On April 7, the legendary Polish submarine Ozhel, which made so much noise in the Baltic in September 1939, when anti-submarine formations of the German and Soviet fleets were chasing it, launched the Norwegian operation, sinking the German transport Rio de Janeiro, packed with paratroopers. The transport with the landing force was heading towards Narvik, about which the boat immediately reported to the commander of the metropolitan fleet, Admiral Forbes. On the same day, the British began to mine Norwegian waters.

Early on the morning of April 9, residents of Copenhagen, riding bicycles to work, suddenly found themselves among the columns of German soldiers marching towards the royal palace. At first, the Danes decided that a movie was being shot. A few minutes later, the palace guards opened fire, the Germans responded. The shootout did not last long. The adjutant of the king appeared and ordered the palace guards to cease fire. The Germans occupied the palace. Denmark was occupied in one day. In itself, she was of no value, but her flank position in the North Sea made it necessary, in the opinion of German strategists, her occupation before the invasion of Norway,

On the same day, under the cover of a storm and snowstorms, the Germans landed sea and air assault forces in Norway. However, things quickly didn't go as planned. Although Quisling swore to the Germans that the entire Norwegian army was on their side and would not put up any resistance, all these oaths, as usual, turned out to be a bluff.

The Germans, who threw almost all the available forces of their surface fleet into the Norwegian operation, suffered heavy losses. When crossing the Oslo fiord, Norwegian coastal batteries sank the heavy cruiser Blucher, which went into the icy waters of the fjord with the entire crew. In Oslo itself, where even before the landing of the German airborne assault all the key positions were captured by Quisling's men, the Germans were in for a big disappointment. An English sabotage group led by Niels Grieg - the nephew of the famous composer - right from under the noses of the Germans and collaborators stole the country's gold reserves. In one of the quiet bays, the gold was quickly reloaded onto the English cruiser Galatea and sent to Great Britain.

Meanwhile, the English fleet appeared on the scene. The cruiser Koenigsberg, which was delayed in the fiord, was hit by aircraft from the British aircraft carrier Furios, becoming the first ship of the Second World War to be sunk by air bombs. The "pocket" battleship "Lutzow" - the former "Deutschland", renamed on the personal order of Hitler, tormented by gloomy forebodings - with a stern torpedoed by torpedoes, was hardly towed to the base. The cruiser "Karlsruhe", intercepted by an English submarine, capsized and sank with the entire crew. One by one, the transports sank under the blows of British aircraft and destroyers. The English destroyers that broke into the harbor of Narvik staged a real pogrom there - one by one German transports went to the bottom, destroyers burned. The only two German battleships, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, sent to sea to carry out long-range landing cover, were intercepted by the English battlecruiser Rinaun. Fifteen-inch shells from the Rinaun began to tear the Gneisenau to pieces. An impenetrable snow charge hides opponents from each other. Taking advantage of this, the Germans quickly retreat to the base, crushing the hull on the ice. Two days later, the initiative again passed to the British, and they landed troops in Narvik and Trondheim. The German garrisons, cut off from Germany by sea, find themselves in a desperate situation. In Trondheim, the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper, a brother of the sunken Blucher, was damaged by a ram attack from the English destroyer Gloworm. English paratroopers, supported by the fire of their cruisers, press the Germans to the water. Two squadron tankers - "Kattegat" and "Skagerrak" - trying to break through to the aid of the "Hipper", go to the bottom under the fire of British ships. And then a miracle happens. It is not known from where two transports with paratroopers and a huge tanker "Jan Wellem" appear. The soldiers who quickly landed on the shore immediately enter the battle and throw the British away from Trondheim. "Jan Wellem" supplies fuel oil to the detachment of "Admiral Hipper" and hurries to Narvik, where the situation for the Germans is almost catastrophic.

In the heat of battle, no one asks the question of where the Jan Wellem and the two transports with the landing came from. Who is supposed to know that they came from Murmansk! But Narvik is already blockaded by the British from the sea and from land. Fifteen-inch shells of the English battleship Warspite, which entered the fiord, fall on the heads of the mountain rangers. The veteran of the Battle of Jutland again spoke to the Germans in the only language they understood.

The flotilla of German destroyers stuck in Narvik had already used up all their fuel. The desperate attempt of "Jan Wellem" to break through to their aid ended tragically. Shot at point-blank range by British destroyers, a huge tanker, engulfed in flames, is thrown ashore, where its gigantic black-and-red hull rusted until the early 50s.

Having lost their last hope, the German sailors decided to flood their destroyers and, having formed a detachment of marines, go to the land front to help the surrounded mountain rangers. At this stage of the operation, the English fleet suffered minimal losses, but for every destroyer lost, the British built ten during the war. The heavy and unjustified losses of the German fleet were irreplaceable. The complex of the Norwegian operation was added to the Scapa Flow complex.

"Congratulations on a brilliant landing," Molotov telegraphed flatteringly from Moscow to Ribbentrop. Berlin did not answer, because about the "brilliant landing" Hitler gave a tantrum to Raeder and Keitel. He hoped for something completely different, but he deceived himself and was deceived. No no no! You can't mess with the English at sea! The landing in Norway is doomed. He is deceived! Quisling must be shot, for he has lured us into an English trap. General Dietl immediately give the order to break through with his troops to Sweden and interne there. It's better than they all die or get captured by those vile Jews - the British! Hitler is hysterical, he does not want to listen to any excuses. In a fit of suffocation, he tears his tie. In less than four months of this year, 14 submarines have already perished! Moreover, one of them was sunk by a deck seaplane with

English battleship. The whole world laughs over the German fleet together with the British! Where is the Norwegian merchant fleet? It's all taken over by the British! Where is the gold reserve? In the name of what did we bleed the fleet?! Raeder is silent, for he has nothing to say. He warned the Fuhrer that until Plan Z was carried out, it would be folly to challenge the British at sea. Hadn't Hitler promised him that there would be no war with the British until this plan was carried out. Go tell him now...

Having exhausted himself with hysteria, Hitler falls into a chair, massaging his throat with his hand. A tall, sloppily dressed man appears from behind a heavy curtain - Dr. Theodor Morell, the Fuhrer's personal physician. With a syringe in his hand, he approaches Hitler. Childlike gullibility and fear flare up in the eyes of the dictator. He quickly and obediently rolls up the sleeve of his brown party shirt. The generals close their eyes - the needle digs into the Fuhrer's hand. He leans back in his chair and sits like that for several minutes, closing his eyes [19].

The silence of the generals is interrupted by Halder. Approaching the map, he, tactfully choosing his words, characterizes the situation as difficult, but far from hopeless. The plight in which the army found itself in Norway due to the weakness of the Kriegsmarine can be easily compensated by simply shifting the center of gravity of operations from the northeast to the west. If the Fuhrer gives the order to attack in the west, then the British will most likely be forced to transfer the main forces of their fleet closer to the canal, thereby easing pressure on Norway, which will make it possible to make another attempt to release the encircled units in Narvik and Trondheim. This is the first. Secondly, as the Fuehrer is, of course, well aware, the possibility of supplying Narvik by land through Swedish territory is currently being explored. A successful offensive will solve the Norwegian question automatically. Halder is sure that all his colleagues share this point of view.

Leaning his hands on the table, Hitler examines the map for several minutes and raises his eyes to Halder: "Through Belgium and Holland?" Halder shrugs silently. "What do we have left in the East?" "Seven divisions, my Fuhrer."

Hitler begins to nervously measure the huge office with nervous steps. Seven divisions! Funny! And if the Kremlin cannibal puts an ax in the back of our heads? He won't do it! Why? He is capable of any meanness and crime! No, my Fuhrer. The Soviets are now incapable of undertaking large-scale military action. They have bled too much in the fight against the valiant Finns. They are reorganizing the army. They have a lot to do. Hitler looks at Ribbentrop. He agrees with the opinion of the military. Moreover, he is sure that Stalin views the agreement with Germany not as a piece of paper, but as an alliance of socialist states against Jewish-plutocratic democracies.

With a sharp movement of his hand, Hitler interrupts his foreign minister. Brought up in the spirit of Austrian sentimentality, Hitler sincerely believes in ideological friendship. He suffers and simply cries when life presents him with cruel lessons in the form of perfidy and venality of yesterday's friends, like Rem and Strasser. Despising the Italians, he sincerely loves Mussolini. Hating Bolshevism because of the huge number of Jews in its ranks, he sincerely admires Stalin.

Hitler understands with the sixth sense of a neurotic that if Mussolini is a much smaller personality, then Stalin is a much larger figure. He understands this with his heart and understands it correctly, but his head rebels, giving rise to new complexes in his already complex nature, forcing him to do something that would amaze or even stun his Moscow friend and raise him, Hitler, to the level of the lord of the Kremlin.

No, he can't say anything. Stalin is correct to the limit. Deliveries to Germany are going smoothly. Moreover, Stalin keeps his word and provides him, Hitler, with moral support throughout the world. Take, for example, the French communists. Still

You will simply envy the Stalinist world organization! What discipline! After all, it seems that the French communists are French by nationality, by blood. But they received an order from Moscow, so what? Like bulldogs clinging to the ass of their own country. Aggressive war against Germany! It is alien to the working class! Soldiers, do not follow the orders of your bourgeois officers. Workers, strike to disrupt government military orders! According to intelligence, desertion has increased sharply in the French army, many units are unreliable, and the rear is falling apart.

Or take Sweden. Soviet intelligence first spread through its channels a rumor about an imminent German invasion of the country, and then published an official statement about the USSR's interest in maintaining and strengthening Swedish neutrality. And under the guise of all this, it was possible to agree with the Swedes on the passage of echelons with supplies and reinforcements for the mountain rangers of Dittl through their territory.

No, Stalin seems genuinely sympathetic to Germany's goals. Ribbentrop is right: Stalin hates Western democracies and wholeheartedly contributes to their destruction. Okay, let's take a chance! Hitler straightens up. The generals stand at attention. Hitler takes another look at the map and sets the offensive on the Western Front for May 9, 1940...

On May 1, Moscow wakes up from the roar of trumpets and drums. Marches rumble. On Red Square, troops froze in even rectangles - selected units allocated for the parade.

The new People's Commissar of Defense Tymoshenko, demonstrating his cavalry skills, makes the rounds of the troops and congratulates them on the holiday. Thousand voices "Hurrah!" flies over the square, frightening pigeons from the spiers of the historical museum.

But Stalin does not look at the gray-green ranks of troops screaming "Hurrah!" before the white horse of the new people's commissar, nor at the beautiful domes, looking at which, his favorite Ivan the Terrible once made the sign of the cross. Stalin does not look - Stalin thinks, walking behind the backs of the members of the Politburo, sucking, as usual, an extinct pipe.

Soviet intelligence sent a message that on May 9 the Germans would launch an offensive on the Western Front. What to do? The previous day, he had held a meeting with those inside the Thunderstorm plan, whose number, unfortunately, was steadily growing, raising fears of a possible leak of information. In addition to Shaposhnikov and Meretskov, Timoshenko, Zhdanov and Beria had to be included in the plan. They figured it out, and it turned out that the Germans would be able to leave five to eight divisions in Poland to cover. Shaposhnikov thought about it and said that, apparently, they would leave seven. Well, seven or eight, it doesn't matter. Meretskov, choking with excitement, offered to strike the next day after the start of the German offensive. Even the always balanced Shaposhnikov's eyes lit up. Stalin never saw him like this. The military began to convince the leader that, according to all calculations, the Germans would be able to provide effective resistance to the Red Army only beyond Berlin. They guarantee the capture of Berlin a maximum of two weeks after the start of the operation.

Stalin listened attentively, holding back his rising anger. Two weeks! Didn't they promise him to take Helsinki in two weeks?! Didn't they disgrace him to the whole world, and now they promise to take Berlin in two weeks! No one noticed that something terrible had happened. Stalin, who

never trusted his army as a political organization, after the Finnish war he stopped trusting it as a military force.

Of course, the Thunderstorm looks great on the map. From the western ledge of the Bialystok balcony to Berlin is within easy reach. Auxiliary attacks on East Prussia and Denmark, capture of the coast, connection with the advancing Anglo-French somewhere beyond Berlin. The Lviv balcony looks even more tempting. With a short blow, Czechoslovakia is cut off from the Reich,

a breakthrough through Romania, the road to the Balkans is open, creating the possibility of a flank bypass of the French, the capture of northern Italy and the invasion of southern France. Landing in the Dardanelles. Stalin closes his eyes, and before him stands the image of the globe, decorated with the "Hammer and Sickle" - just like on the state emblem of the USSR. Gold from Swiss banks, sailing to Moscow, as has already happened with the gold reserves of Spain. ("Nothing will work," one of the advisers told him, "the Swiss army will go to the mountains and hide the gold reserve there." Never mind, they will quickly come down from the mountains when we begin to carry out repressive measures with their relatives.) Worldwide Lenin's brilliant call: "Plunder the loot!" will be carried out, we will erect a monument to the great teacher in the center of Berlin. It's a pity that you can't make horseback ... Stalin opens his eyes and catches a fragment of Shaposhnikov's phrase: "Almost all tanks are equipped with interchangeable automobile chassis. When entering the European highways, this will significantly increase the pace of the offensive ... "

"We'll see," the leader says to the generals. - Put the army in order, time is short ... "

It is necessary to put the army in order from the head. On the table, Stalin already has a signed decree on the introduction of personal military ranks into the Red Army. Commanders, corps commanders and divisional commanders, fanned by the romance of the civil war, will disappear forever from the workers' and peasants' army, giving way to the solid, time-tested ranks of the old imperial Russia. Generals, admirals, colonels, captains of all ranks, from May 7, 1940, will form the officer corps of the army and navy, which will also benefit from a large increase in salaries.

By decree of the same May 7, Shaposhnikov, Timoshenko and Kulik were promoted to marshals of the Soviet Union.

On the same day, the newly minted Marshal Timoshenko held a meeting on issues of military ideology, where reports were heard on the state of discipline and combat training in the Red Army. Opening the meeting, Deputy People's Commissar General Proskurov frankly stated: "No matter how hard it is, I must say directly that there is no such looseness and low level of discipline as we have in any army!" "Right!" voices rang out from the hall.

It was no secret to any of those present that there was unrestrained drunkenness in the army, which caused 80% of all emergencies in aviation and the navy. Back in December 1939, People's Commissar Voroshilov issued a secret order "On the fight against drunkenness in the Red Army", where he called for convening meetings of command and command staff in all regiments, squadrons, squadrons and on ships, at which "to speak in full voice about all the drunken outrages, to condemn drunkenness and drunkards as an unacceptable and shameful phenomenon.

However, due to the fact that the order was marked secret, it was practically not brought to the attention of the personnel, who continued to drink and drink away government property in catastrophic quantities. Along with drunkenness, an unprecedented theft of state property flourished. In almost all parts there was a criminal conspiracy of commanders with commissars, either drinking together, or stealing together, or combining both, which was most often. Selective investigative cases regarding the sad war with the Finns showed that, say, the 374th Infantry Regiment of the 7th Army, which arrived on the Karelian Isthmus in December 1940, according to clothing certificates, was fully equipped with winter special uniforms, i.e. sheepskin coats, sheepskin coats, woolen underwear, felt boots and even reindeer fur pims. The entire personnel of the regiment signed for the receipt of clothing allowances. But the investigation quickly found out that the winter uniforms were stolen directly from the warehouses and resold to someone, but they were not seen in the regiment. No, Comrade Stalin is right as always - nothing serious can be done with such an army. You can be embarrassed again. First you need to take drastic measures to strengthen discipline and improve combat training ...

While Timoshenko, having developed frantic activity, created commissions to tighten the disciplinary regulations, to strengthen combat training programs, to create new defense enterprises and new military educational institutions, Stalin, Shaposhnikov and Meretskov waited with bated breath for developments in the West. Komkor Purkaev, now a lieutenant general, sent a confirmation message - the Germans would begin the offensive at dawn on May 10. This date coincided with all the data received by Soviet intelligence through other channels through Rome, The Hague, Brussels and, of course, Berlin.

On May 9, at 21.00, the Chief of Staff of the German Air Force, General Jeshonek, reported to the Fuhrer, who was in his personal train, that aviation was ready for the task, and weather forecasters would guarantee excellent flying weather in the coming days. After listening to the message, Hitler ordered the prearranged signal "Danzig" to be transmitted to all higher headquarters, which meant that the offensive was scheduled for the next morning.

On May 10, at 05.30, Hitler's headquarters is located in the mountainous region of Münstereifel, having received the code name "Nest on the Rock" - "Felsen Nest". At this moment, the German aviation of two air fleets strikes at the Allied airfields. At 0535, ground troops cross the borders of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Hitler's words, just broadcast on the radio, are heard in the ears of the soldiers: "The struggle that begins today will determine the fate of the German nation for the next thousand years!" The Fuhrer's speech is drowned out by the roar of engines: the second wave of German bombers strike at the French and British headquarters, communication centers and communications.

The French command, in accordance with a plan worked out long before the war, moved 35 French and 10 British divisions into central Belgium towards General von Bock's army group "B", not realizing that they were exposing the rear of their strongest group under attack by the main forces of the Wehrmacht. I must say that the Germans did not understand this either. Contrary to popular belief, the Germans not only did not have any numerical superiority over the allies, but in reality their armies were much smaller than the enemy armies. And they had fewer tanks, and the tanks themselves were much worse than those of the French and British. But in the German army there was an inspired poet of the tank war, General Heinz Guderian, and the generals Gth, Reinhart and Manstein brought up by him.

As in the Polish war, Guderian commanded only a tank corps, which was part of General Kleist's tank group as part of Field Marshal Rundstedt's Army Group A. Before the start of the offensive, Guderian tried in vain to convince his superiors to allow him and Gth to strike through the Ardennes with access to the banks of the Meuse, breaking through the French front in the most vulnerable, in his opinion, place - in the foothills of the wooded Ardennes. Rundstedt and Kleist did not see much point in this, offering their own options for a breakthrough with an obligatory turn to the east in the rear of the Anglo-French grouping. Guderian listened respectfully, but decided once again to prove in practice to the ossified Kaiser generals what modern war is. Having crossed the Ardennes, Guderian's tanks in two and a half days, to the complete amazement of Rundstedt and Kleist and the great horror of Halder, leaving behind 120 kilometers, reached the banks of the Meuse near Sedan. In vain Rundstedt and Kleist demanded that Guderian immediately stop, take care of his flanks, wait for artillery and infantry. Crossing the Meuse on the move, repelling a belated French counterattack, Guderian suddenly turned west. By the end of the next day, his tanks broke through the last defensive position of the enemy and opened their way to the west - to the coast of the Pas de Calais.

Cut by the tank wedges of Hoth and Guderian, the French army was falling apart before our eyes. The leadership of the troops was broken. The British expeditionary force began to roll back to the coast in the direction of Dunkirk. The success was so unexpected that the German command did not believe in it and was not ready for its implementation. Halder

worried about the defunct French strategic reserve, waiting to be brought into action. Hitler, as usual, freaked out, fearing unprecedented success. He imagined some French units on the southern flank. Pushing himself to the limit, he demanded that Guderian be stopped immediately. Rundstedt and Kleist bombarded Guderian with radiograms, demanding to stop. Guderian continued to move forward, coordinating the actions of Hoth and Reinhardt. The enraged Hitler ordered Guderian to be removed from command, arrested, and taken to Berlin for trial.

Unable to contain his anxiety, Hitler arrived at the command post of Army Group A on May 17 and blasted Rundstedt for his recklessness and negligence. He ordered an immediate halt to the offensive and a regrouping of forces. But here the OKW intervened, which gradually understood Guderian's plan and immediately issued a new directive under this plan. Hitler would be categorically against it. Keitel, Jodl and Rundstedt were already trying to convince the Fuhrer in unison.

While fierce disputes were going on in the supreme leadership, Guderian, on the morning of May 20, having cut off the supply lines to the left wing of the Allied forces in Belgium, went to the sea near Abbeville. Guderian then moved further north to the ports of the Pas de Calais, behind the lines of the English army, which was still in Belgium, fighting the armies of von Bock. On May 22, Guderian's troops cut off the British retreat to Boulogne, and the next day to Calais. The British began to hastily withdraw their forces to Dunkirk, the last port left in their hands. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg capitulated. The remnants of the French troops retreated south in a panic, opening the way for the Germans to Paris. Under the stress of impending military disaster, the Chamberlain government collapsed. Winston Churchill took the chair of the English prime minister, vowing to fight to the end. Cheered up, Hitler, finally believing in unprecedented success, ordered Guderian to be promoted to colonel-general and to cancel his orders to remove him from his post and put him on trial [20].

Meanwhile, Guderian's tanks, continuing to move forward, by the end of May 23, were already only 10 kilometers from Dunkirk, the last Allied stronghold on the coast, where almost the entire British expeditionary force and several French divisions had withdrawn. And then, at first glance, an absolutely incredible event happened. Guderian's tanks suddenly stopped. Reingart's tanks also stopped, taking Dunkirk in pincers from the southeast. For some reason, this stop is considered one of the mysteries of the Second World War and not just overgrown with legends, but turned into one solid legend, the authors of which were initially wounded German generals, who did not want to admit the fact that they did not stop, but they were stopped by the British.

According to this legend, which has its roots in the headquarters of Field Marshal Rundstedt, on the night of May 22-23, a telegram from Hitler was sent to the field marshal with an order to stop the troops near Dunkirk, leaving the destruction of the British aviation, artillery and fleet, which, incidentally, was not in this area at all. Having received the order, the stunned Rundstedt decided that this was an English provocation. They still remembered well how, using the cipher of the German Admiralty, they ordered the squadron of Admiral Spee to follow to the Falkland Islands, where it was completely destroyed. Therefore, the field marshal requested confirmation of the order from the Fuhrer's headquarters, and received this confirmation. An order is an order, and Rundstedt ordered his tanks to stop. The dashing Guderian, who for two weeks ignored all orders from the headquarters of the army group and rushed forward, now that under the tracks of his tanks there were more than three hundred thousand panic-stricken British, i.e. on the eve of an unprecedented triumph, he suddenly obediently froze in place and, as the documents show, did not even ask either Rundstedt or Kleist about the reasons for this, to put it mildly, strange order. Since no one could understand the motivations for such an order from the Fuhrer, the second legend was born on this basis, lovingly cobbled together by Soviet historians.

Based on the lies of the German generals, the new legend claimed that Hitler specifically allowed the British to evacuate their expeditionary forces, since there was already a conspiracy between him and the "ruling imperialist circles" England to make peace and jointly attack the USSR.

In reality, everything was much simpler: the Germans entered the zone of action of the British naval artillery, and for their "cardboard" gasoline tanks it was deadly [21]. Therefore, right under the noses of the German tanks, the British carried out a major strategic operation to evacuate their troops to the metropolis. Air strikes did not bring the desired result - the British airfields were too close. Fighter aircraft of the Royal Air Force reliably covered the evacuation, as for the fleet, it never appeared, and acted wisely - a powerful formation of the metropolitan fleet covered the approaches to the strait. Guderian's attempt to break through to Dunkirk was repulsed by a hurricane of British naval artillery fire: 72 German tanks were blown to pieces under a hail of heavy naval artillery shells, and that's when Field Marshal Rundstedt reported to the Fuhrer that further advance to Dunkirk was fraught with heavy losses in tanks. The Fuhrer, barely hearing about the English fleet, immediately ordered to stop the attack on Dunkirk. However, this time no one was going to challenge his order, since the Germans had already been stopped, and Hitler, by his order, only legally confirmed this stop.

"Domination of the sea," the famous English admiral John Fisher philosophized at the beginning of the century, "is reduced to ensuring that in any area of the world's oceans the most damned wreck under our flag can sail calmly and safely." It is difficult to think of a more convincing illustration of Lord Fisher's remark than the British evacuation of Dunkirk under the very noses of the Germans.

In the period up to June 4, the British took 338,226 people by sea from Dunkirk. Desperate attempts by several divisions of German torpedo boats to break through to the landing sites on boats gave negligible results. Leaving the coast of France, the British soldiers threw their helmets on the coast, the whole mountains of which could be surveyed in the vicinity of Dunkirk. German, and after it the Soviet propaganda, gave out and continue to give out these pyramids of English helmets as proof of the panic that gripped the British, apparently not knowing that, according to a tradition dating back to the Napoleonic wars, an abandoned helmet means: "We will return!" Simultaneously with the evacuation of Dunkirk, the sharply changed situation on the continent forced the British to evacuate Norway as well, confirming Halder's prediction that the key to solving the Norwegian problem lay on the Western Front.

The French army, demoralized and decomposed by the communists, continued to retreat south in a panic. On July 10, Mussolini, plucking up his courage, finally decided to support his Berlin idol by declaring war on England and France. "I will personally bomb London with great pleasure," the Italian foreign minister, Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano, who had a pilot's license, told the British ambassador in Rome. "But just be careful, earl," the English ambassador answered him dryly, "for if you are shot down over London, I will be inconsolable."

Hitler was overjoyed - the powerful Italian fleet promised to somewhat ease the terrible pressure that the English fleet exerted on Germany. While Hitler entertained such illusions, the German troops continued their offensive. On June 14, they entered Paris, where they were enthusiastically received by local communists, who for some reason decided that for the services rendered to the Germans and because of sincere relations between Berlin and Moscow, they would be allowed a legal existence with permission to release their beloved "Humanite". The arrests quickly carried out by the Germans, the defeat of the headquarters and editorial offices of the Communist Party completely confused the French communists, who were in prostration right up to September 1941, while Semyon Kaganovich, who arrived from Switzerland, was a cousin

the famous Lazar - did not bring them new instructions from Moscow.

The French government asked Hitler for a truce. Churchill's call to retreat to North Africa and continue the war was ignored. Not requests, but prayers were already flying to Berlin. The vengeful Hitler agreed to a truce on the condition that most of France remain occupied and the signing ceremony of the truce would take place in the Compiègne forest, in the very headquarters of Marshal Foch, kept by the French as a national relic, where the Kaiser generals signed the surrender in 1918.

20 June Hitler arrives in Compiègne. He's excited. What he had dreamed of for years had come to pass: to avenge the disgrace of Compiègne. Compiègne is avenged! Now we must avenge Scapa Flow. Right in Foch's car, Hitler gives the order for Operation Sea Lion, an operation to invade England. He personally visits the Normandy coast, handing out crosses to the tankers of General Hoth. The Fuhrer looks through the English Channel through a powerful stereo tube. The chalk cliffs of Dover are vaguely white in the optical grid. For centuries impregnable Albion! But now it's over for you! With difficulty tearing his greedy gaze from the eyepieces of the stereo tube, Hitler, throwing up his hand in a party greeting, goes to the car. A quartet of accordionists, composed of decorated tankers, plays Hitler's favorite sentimental melody of "Donna Clara".

In London, Churchill puffs his invariable cigar in displeasure. He was sure, and intelligence data confirmed that Stalin would take advantage of the situation and strike at Hitler from the rear. You have to be just an idiot not to take advantage of such a favorable moment. The prime minister looks at a map of Eastern Europe, shifts his gaze to Moscow and says words to Stalin that are not literally translated, but in a literary translation they mean: "Bug!" Half a glass of cognac brings Churchill back to grim reality. It was possible to save the army, but all heavy weapons had to be abandoned in France. Well, it's a living thing. The main thing is that the fleet is alive - the age-old support of the power of the empire. God save the king! God save our country! God save our fleet!

All these events, numb with amazement and fear, were followed from Moscow. Despite the fact that the Soviet government was fully aware of the upcoming events, their development caught Stalin and his entourage by surprise. In addition to exhaustive and unquestionable intelligence information, Stalin received official German advance notice of it on the eve of the German offensive in the West. On May 9, Count Schulenburg conveyed to Molotov an official message from his boss, Ribbentrop, stating that Germany was forced to take defensive measures in the face of the clear intention of the Anglo-French to invade the Ruhr area.

"Molotov has no doubts about our success," Schulenburg joyfully radioed to Berlin, whose Bismarckian training made one rejoice at such a sincere rapprochement between Russia and Germany.

While Hitler's and Stalin's diplomats were exchanging cordial courtesies, while Hitler, frightened by Guderian's breakthrough, was yelling at his headquarters, which were not having time to map the advance of their own tanks, Stalin, silently puffing on his pipe, listened to the passionate appeals of Shaposhnikov, Meretskov, and Timoshenko, who had already joined them, to begin an immediate offensive. The data of military intelligence and intelligence of the NKVD coincided in their assessments: a coordinated offensive by Soviet and Anglo-French troops would crush the Nazi Reich like a rotten egg. Moreover, the Red Army will have time to reach the Elbe. The head of the main intelligence department of the Red Army, General Ivan Proskurov, in addition, pointed out that the Germans actually had no defense in the east.

"What if they agree?" asked the leader, still thinking in the crazy Leninist formulations of the inevitable crusade of the bourgeoisie against the workers' and peasants' kingdom.

In vain, General Proskurov, with facts in hand, tried to prove to the leader that collusion was impossible, Stalin was silent. Molotov and Zhdanov were silent, afraid to get out of tune. The Finnish war continued to put pressure on Stalin.

By and large, it was the valiant Finns who saved Europe from being captured by Stalin in May 1940.

Marshal Shaposhnikov, who worked with Trotsky for many years, caught himself thinking, which he told his wife shortly before his death, that if Trotsky had been in Stalin's place, he would not have hesitated for a minute to launch an offensive.

Even then, the Red Army was twice as superior to the Wehrmacht in almost all respects. General Proskurov, who sincerely believed that the Red Army, if it stopped its unrestrained drunkenness, could easily take over the whole world, and if it continued to drink, it could still take over Europe, allowed himself the imprudence to quote in the presence of leader Trotsky, however, without calling him by his last name. "A favorable moment for starting a war comes when the enemy, for objective reasons, turns his back on you." The head of the GRU did not take into account that Comrade Stalin knew all the classics of Marxism by heart and from amazement that in his presence someone dared to quote Trotsky, even choked, taking his pipe out of his mouth, but did not say anything.

The tactlessness that Marshal Shaposhnikov allowed himself in his thoughts and General Proskurov out loud hurt the leader painfully. The hint was taken. Moreover, Trotsky himself from distant Mexico City warned mankind with all the means available to him that Stalin was already ready to take over the world. The author and theorist of the permanent revolution went crazy with rage that his great ideas of capturing the world by provoking social and then military conflicts were used by a pathetic and illiterate seminarian. This annoyed Iosif Vissarionovich, and for about a year a large brigade from the liquidation department of the NKVD, having spread their networks in the USA and Mexico, was preparing to forever protect the great leader from accusations of plagiarism.

"We must not hurry," the leader would say thoughtfully at the end of each such meeting, "we'll see how things go." The developers of Groza, who encouraged Stalin to take action, proceeded from the premise that the fighting in the West would take on a long, fierce character that would allow the Soviet Union to choose the optimal time to strike.

Soviet military intelligence correctly identified the opposing forces. The Germans concentrated 136 divisions, 2580 tanks, 3824 aircraft, 7378 guns on the Western Front. They were opposed by 147 Anglo-French divisions, 3,100 tanks, 3,800 combat aircraft and over 14,500 artillery pieces. These figures alone indicated that a long and bloody mutual meat grinder, similar to the one at Verdun, was inevitable.

The only concern was that the Germans, being clearly weaker, would not bleed to death in these battles, left, as in the last war, without supplies and ammunition. Their invigorating march was the clatter of the wheels of countless echelons carrying to Germany Soviet oil, wheat, cotton, nickel, chromium, and everything that the Reich's growing military industry needed. Soviet merchant ships with huge red letters USSR on a white background - a sign of neutrality - delivered the same cargo to German ports through the Baltic, inaccessible to the British blockade. Germany was in dire need of copper, but the USSR produced copper in negligible quantities. The exit has been found. Soviet Union

managed to conclude a contract for the purchase of copper in the United States. This copper was immediately transported to Germany. Just fight, guys, as you should, we will give you, we will not regret anything, destroy the capitalist world.

In the first days of the German offensive, when the opposing armies began vanguard battles in Holland and Belgium, everything seemed to go according to the scenario outlined in Moscow. Behind the reinforced concrete fortifications of the Maginot and Siegfried lines, one could fight indefinitely. Barely restraining jubilation, Pravda of May 16, 1940 wrote:

"During the first five days, the German army achieved significant success. The Germans occupied a significant part of Holland, including Rotterdam. The Dutch government has already fled to England. The Anglo-French bloc had long-standing ambitions to draw Holland and Belgium into the war against Germany ... After the Germans got ahead of England and France in Scandinavia, the last two countries did everything possible to draw Holland and Belgium into the war ... Now we see how great the responsibility Anglo-French imperialists who, rejecting all German proposals for peace, unleashed the Second Imperialist War in Europe.

However, the further development of events made even such an unprincipled press as the Soviet one dumbfounded. The lightning-fast defeat of the French army - an army that Stalin (and not only him) considered the strongest in Europe, giving it a leading role in the notorious crusade against the USSR, caused shock in Moscow.

When the capture of Paris by the Germans was announced, Stalin opened the safe for the first time in the presence of his accomplices, a mysterious safe built into the wall of his Kremlin office, where, to the greatest surprise of all those present, there was an open bottle of Kakhetinsky, two packs of English pipe tobacco and a vial of Bestuzhev drops. . Having dripped Bestuzhev drops for himself, Stalin, without saying a word, left all those present and left the Kremlin for a nearby dacha, where the Kogan brothers, the leader's invariable life doctors, were urgently summoned.

"According to the information we have," the ageless Intelligence Service urgently reported from Moscow, "Stalin had a heart attack or a severe heart attack. Our source connects the illness of the Soviet leader with the defeat of the allied armies on continent.

Is this not evidence that Stalin, rooting for democracy with his soul, is playing a difficult game with Hitler, choosing the right moment to destroy him as a rival to Stalin's hegemony in Europe and the world.

After reading the message of his intelligence, Churchill sat down for his first message to Stalin. "The British government is convinced that Germany is fighting for hegemony in Europe ... This is equally dangerous for both the USSR and England. Therefore, both countries must come to an agreement on the implementation of a common policy for self-defense against Germany and the restoration of the European balance of power ... "

This message, where Stalin was guaranteed full British assistance if he decided to hit his friend - Hitler - with an ax on the back of the head and a transparent hint was made about the British being aware of such a secret desire of Comrade Stalin, first of all said that

British intelligence already knows about Operation Thunderstorm and, if necessary, it will, of course, with great pleasure inform Hitler of this.

If it is not possible to set Stalin against Hitler, then why not set Hitler against Stalin? The message was transmitted through the new British ambassador in Moscow, Sir

Stafford Cripps - the most leftist that Churchill, who hates communists, could find in his entourage. Sir Stafford made sure that Stalin received him "for a confidential conversation."

Still not quite recovered from a heart attack, Stalin, of course, should not have received the British ambassador at all, and even with such a provocative message from the British prime minister. However, he did it, and did it for a reason, deciding to take the opportunity to once again demonstrate his devotion and loyalty to Hitler, without giving him even a hint of doubt.

The reception was formal and very cold. After listening to Churchill's message, Stalin gave the following answer:

"Stalin does not see any danger of the hegemony of any one state in Europe, and least of all any danger that Europe may be absorbed by Germany. Stalin follows the policy of Germany and knows well many of the leading statesmen of this country. He did not notice any desire on their part to absorb European countries. Stalin does not believe that Germany's military successes threaten the Soviet Union and its friendly relations with Germany ... "

"This tyrant," Churchill remarked, "belongs to the most vulnerable type of people. A complete ignoramus, bursting with self-conceit and complacency.

Churchill was mistaken in wishful thinking. England, left alone against Germany, feverishly begins to put together an anti-German coalition. The illegitimate child of the British Empire - the United States - with all its behavior terribly annoying both Hitler and Stalin, make it clear that they will not leave their old mother in trouble, however, no one is afraid of the United States yet. The 300,000-strong army of the overseas republic with one experimental armored battalion does not arouse serious attitude on the part of the leaders, who have multimillion-strong armies and thousands of tanks. A land of shopkeepers corrupted by democracy. Congress has already twice defeated the bill for universal conscription ...

Despite the assurances given to Cripps that the conversation was confidential, Stalin immediately made the Germans aware of it, evoking the delight of Ribbentrop and the alarmed look of Hitler. Stalin does this quickly so that the British do not get ahead of him by slipping his own text to the Germans. He understands what game Churchill started. Everything is quite obvious. England needs soldiers to save the empire, and where can you find more of them than Stalin? But Stalin is not at all inclined to turn the Red Army into an army of British colonial soldiers. In the meantime, all measures must be taken to maintain friendly relations with Hitler. And these relationships are better than you can imagine.

As gray shadows, German submarines are leaving for English communications from two bases on the territory of the USSR. The orchestra of the Leningrad Naval Base greets the heavy cruiser Seydlitz, towed from Germany, sold in the USSR for 100 million marks. The drawings of the newest German battleship Bismarck, destroyers of the Narvik type, technological maps of gun mounts were handed over to the Soviet side. Soviet aircraft designers are studying with interest samples of the Me-109, Me-110, Yu-87 and Xe-111 aircraft received from Germany.

The Gestapo delegation visits their Moscow colleagues, presenting them with a gift of a nail-pulling machine. Not very literate Soviet Chekists look with some fear at the desktop monster shining with nickel-plated and blued parts. A fist in the face or a foot in the groin is easier and more reliable. For subject training, the Gestapo receive

German communists sitting in Sukhanovka.

The chief of the delegation, Brigadeführer Dalyuge, in a conversation with People's Commissar Merkulov, notes German concern that the British are creating the Polish Liberation Army. There are several hundred thousand Polish prisoners of war in the USSR, including 15 thousand officers. Can the Soviet side guarantee that these Poles will not end up in the Liberation Army? "Maybe!" - Merkulov firmly answers, and Gestapo experts are present at the mass executions of Polish officers in the Katyn forest. The new Soviet naval attaché in Berlin, Captain 1st Rank Vorontsov, and the German naval attaché in Moscow, von Baumbach, successfully negotiated the escort of German surface raiders along the Northern Sea Route to the Pacific Ocean - deep behind British lines, where their merchant ships are all still walking without any protection.

Recovering from the shock caused by the German victories, the developers of the Thunderstorm indicated to Stalin that the new situation had become even more favorable for the implementation of the plan. First of all, the French army ceased to exist. Almost the only army left in Europe is the German one. Now you can not be afraid of any conspiracy of the European powers against the USSR. Now our main task is to incite Hitler to invade England. And that's when... Stalin makes an impatient motion with his pipe, interrupting the military, repeating his traditional phrase: "And if they agree?" Then one day even Zhdanov could not stand it and dared to answer: "If they agree, then so much the worse for them, Comrade Stalin."

But Stalin is relentless. Bring order to the army, he demanded. With such an army it is impossible to make a European revolution. In addition, before embarking on the "Thunderstorm", it is necessary to carry out a number of intermediate measures, the essence of which was laid down in the German-Soviet agreements in August and September of last year. It is, explained the leader, about the termination of the incomprehensible state in the Baltic states and the return of the primordially Russian lands, torn away in 1918 by Romania. And therefore, as soon as the army and the NKVD cope with this intermediate task, he, Stalin, will judge how ready the army and the organs are to carry out the incomparably larger and more difficult task envisaged by Operation Thunderstorm.

On June 17, 1940, on the very day that defeated France requested a truce, Molotov summoned Schulenburg to him, expressing to him "the warmest and most sincere congratulations of the Soviet government on the brilliant successes of the German armed forces." Molotov's somewhat excited look told Schulenburg that he had been summoned to the Kremlin not only to convey the congratulations of the Soviet government. Indeed, after a short silence, Molotov informed the German ambassador that "the USSR intends to carry out the Anschluss of the Baltic States."

To accomplish this task, the USSR sent its emissaries to the Baltic republics: Zhdanov to Estonia, Vyshinsky to Latvia, and Dekanozov to Lithuania.

If the first two are well known, then a few words should be said about Dekanozov, since he will be destined to play a fairly large and even somewhat fatal role in Operation Thunderstorm. An Armenian by origin, in his youth he joined the Dashnaktsutyun organization of Armenian militants, led by his brother. The organization, which had a rather vague political program, was mainly engaged in outright robbery and robbery.

Lenin, being in exile and constantly in need of money, developed an original plan for obtaining money from numerous robber gangs operating on the territory of an immense empire. The gangs were constantly in need of weapons, and Lenin's emissaries went to them, offering to supply weapons for money. The robbers willingly paid, but

in exchange, as a rule, they did not receive a shish. Suffice it to recall the scandal with the famous Ural robber Stepan Oglobley, whose people nevertheless got to Paris and shook Lenin out of the 10 thousand rubles due to them. Litvinov, already well-known to us, got in touch with Dashnaktsutyun. He was associated with the magnificent Kamo-Koba couple, who did the same thing as the Armenian militants, but directly on behalf of the Bolshevik Party. Both gangs easily established an exchange of money and weapons, and this time everything went honestly and nobly. It was then that the young Koba-Stalin met the young Dekanozov, retaining the best opinion of him until the end of his life.

Later, Stalin recommended "Dekanos", as he lovingly called him, to his friend Beria, who brought him with him to Moscow and attached him to begin with in the department of his powerful people's commissariat, who, on the personal order of the leader, was collecting compromising materials against the people's commissars, their deputies and other high-ranking persons of the party-administrative hierarchy. Dekanozov got the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. In other words, Molotov himself and his entourage. At the same time, Beria, having agreed on the issue with Stalin, decided that those of his employees who deal with the affairs of people's commissars should hold responsible positions in the relevant people's commissariats, remaining, of course, in their positions in the NKVD nomenclature.

Dekanozov became Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, while remaining the head of one of the NKVD departments.

Stalin personally, in the presence of Lavrenty Pavlovich, entrusted Dekanos with the general outline of the Thunderstorm plan and ordered the implementation of the Anschluss of Lithuania, emphasizing that of all the Baltic republics, Lithuania is the most important, since it alone has a border with Germany and is of great value for the deployment of troops along general plan of operation.

Preparations for the mission entrusted to Dekanozov began in May, when several drunken Soviet soldiers staged an orgy with Lithuanian girls in one of the basements of the old part of Vilnius. Three days later, two soldiers returned to their unit, while three disappeared and were not found.

On May 25, Molotov summoned the Lithuanian ambassador Natkevicius to him and made a statement to him "about the increasing cases of disappearances of military personnel from Soviet garrisons on the territory of Lithuania", clearly making it clear that Red Army soldiers were being kidnapped and killed. The Lithuanian side conducted an investigation, but did not find a single case, except for the aforementioned drunkenness in the basement, which was reported to Molotov by a special note dated May 28. However, this was only the beginning. Calling the Lithuanian ambassador once again, Molotov announced to him that he wanted to talk with the Prime Minister of Lithuania. On June 7, Lithuanian Prime Minister Antanas Merkys arrived in Moscow. Without offering the premier to sit down, Molotov, in the harshest terms, accused Merkys of double-dealing. The Soviet government knew for certain that Lithuania had concluded a military convention with Latvia and Estonia directed against the USSR and Germany. Lithuania is preparing to receive a large British expeditionary force. Although the absurdity of all these accusations was obvious, Molotov did not listen to Merkys' excuses. This, he continued, is forcing the USSR to revise the mutual assistance treaty previously concluded with Lithuania. The Soviet government has a new draft of such a treaty. Let the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania also come to Moscow to conclude

new agreement.

On June 11, Minister of Foreign Affairs Urshbis arrived in Moscow. At midnight on June 14, both Lithuanian statesmen were summoned to Molotov in the Kremlin. Without wasting time on the choice of diplomatic expressions, Molotov presented an ultimatum to the Lithuanians, the term of which was set at 9 o'clock. The ultimatum demanded the formation of a new government in Lithuania, the payroll of which Molotov handed over to Merkys. All future ministers of the new

the "governments" were still in Moscow. Many of them were wanted by the Lithuanians as state criminals. This was followed by a demand to ensure free passage to the territory of Lithuania of Soviet troops in any quantity. By 10 o'clock in the morning, the Lithuanian government must give an answer to this ultimatum.

Everyone in Kaunas understood what this ultimatum meant. Lithuania had the strongest army of all the Baltic states. With full mobilization, taking into account the two hundred thousandth voluntary corps of Lithuanian riflemen, Lithuania could put 350 thousand people under arms. But Lithuania did not have its own Mannerheim. Flattered by the Vilnius region taken from Poland, Lithuania forgot the wise proverb that free cheese can only be found in a mousetrap, and fell into this mousetrap. In vain did the President of Lithuania appeal to the European powers. Everyone sympathized, but there was nowhere to get real help. The fronts of the Second World War have already cut the world.

Shortly before the expiration of the ultimatum, the Lithuanian embassy in Moscow received a phone call from Kaunas from Kaunas, the head of the administrative and legal department at the office of the president, Cherniackis, who ordered that Moscow's ultimatum be accepted. Upon learning of this, Molotov became kinder, did not particularly argue about some options for a new government, and, saying goodbye to Merkys and Urbshis, said conciliatorily: "Well, our special envoy will fly to Lithuania today. It is with him that your president should consult on the formation of a new government."

It was this special commissioner that Vladimir Dekanozov was. While negotiations were going on in Moscow, the Red Army had already poured into all the Baltic republics. The Soviet garrisons stationed in the Baltic States ensured in advance the capture of airfields, railway junctions, and vital facilities in cities. There was practically no resistance. So, when Dekanozov arrived in Lithuania, everything was already finished there in general terms.

On June 17, members of the Lithuanian government were shoved into solitary confinement in Vladimir, Tambov and Saratov prisons. Members of the Estonian and Latvian governments, led by their respective presidents, were in neighboring cells. Already on June 18, it was officially announced that the old Cominternist Paleckis, whom "the fascist gang of Smetona had been keeping in a concentration camp since 1939," had been appointed the new Prime Minister of Lithuania. On the same day, all political parties were declared illegal, except for the communist one. Dekanozov, who was responsible for Lithuania, was rapidly ahead of his highly experienced colleagues Zhdanov and Vyshinsky: with such events, Latvia and Estonia were two or three days late compared to Lithuania. But the presidents were captured there, and the Lithuanian one fled.

The ambassadors of the former Baltic republics appealed to Hitler for help. They addressed notes to the German Foreign Ministry, expressing indignation, asking for protection, pointing out the absolute illegality of Moscow's actions. However, the secret protocol to the 1939 treaty clearly stated: "In the event of territorial and political transformations in the areas belonging to the Baltic states, the western border of Lithuania will be the line separating the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR."

While the ambassadors were waiting for a response from the German Foreign Ministry, mass arrests and executions were going on throughout the Baltics. New buildings were requisitioned for prisons, mainly churches and churches. Transfer camps were set up. As always, the main blow was dealt to the national intelligentsia, the clergy, the military, members of the leading political parties, the prosperous peasantry and, of course, the youth, who were considered the most irreconcilable.

The technique of decapitation of the nation - the basis of socialism, worked out on its own people, tested in Poland, gave, as expected, excellent results, showing

around the world, how the famous world proletarian revolution will be carried out. Already on July 21, the new Baltic governments appointed from Moscow declared their republics "Soviet and socialist" and turned to Moscow with a request to accept them into the USSR. The request was, of course, immediately granted. Meanwhile, the ambassadors of the former Baltic republics were still waiting for a response to their appeals for help from the German Foreign Office. They received a long-awaited response on July 24 in the form of a memorandum from the German Foreign Ministry, which stated:

"Today, I returned in a friendly manner to the Lithuanian and Latvian ambassadors their notes regarding the inclusion of their countries in the USSR and, in my defense, stated that we can only accept from the envoys those notes that they submit on behalf of their governments ... The Estonian envoy also wanted to give me a note. I asked him to refrain from doing so, giving the above reasons..."

The front pages of Soviet newspapers were filled with reports of "jubilant demonstrations of the people in Riga and Tallinn", of "a joyful meeting of Red Army units in Tallinn", of "people's celebrations on the occasion of joining the USSR in Kaunas". Meanwhile, along the roads of the Baltic States, Soviet troops marched westward in an endless stream, reaching the borders of East Prussia. Operation Thunderstorm began, although none of those taking part in the invasion knew this. The connection between Stalin's hasty actions and the catastrophe of the Allies on the Western Front was so obvious that already on June 23 the Soviet government found it necessary to publish a very extraordinary statement, which made it clear that the Soviet Union did not care at all about German successes in France: "In connection with the introduction of Soviet troops to the Baltic states," the statement said, "persistent rumors are circulating in the Western press about 100 or 150 Soviet divisions allegedly concentrated on the Soviet-German border. This, they say, comes from the Soviet Union's preoccupation with German military successes in the West, which gave rise to tension in Soviet-German relations.

TASS is authorized to declare that all these rumors are a complete lie. Only 18-20 Soviet divisions were brought into the Baltic states, and they are not at all concentrated on the German border, but dispersed throughout the territory of the Baltic states. The USSR had no intention of exerting any "pressure" on Germany, and all military measures were taken for the sole purpose of ensuring mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and these countries ... Behind all these rumors one can clearly see an attempt to cast a shadow on the Soviet-German relationship. These rumors are generated by the miserable conjectures of some British, American, Swedish and Japanese politicians ... "

The troops continued to roll across the Baltic towards the German border. Newsreel footage flashes in Stalin's personal cinema hall: columns of troops marching along dusty roads. Tanks, armored cars, carts. The squat silhouette of the cruiser "Kirov" in the roadstead of Tallinn. Destroyers and submarines in Ventspils, Daugavpils and Libau. Combat aircraft, famously going to land on captured airfields. Rallies. Political instructors speaking to Estonian farmers. Regimental commissars, broadcasting something in the half-empty shops of some Riga factory. And, of course, portraits of Stalin and a little bit of Molotov. Slogans in Russian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian. "Long live the great Stalin!", "Long live the indestructible friendship of the peoples of the USSR!". Apparently, all these shots gave Stalin so much courage that he ordered a note to be sent to the Germans demanding that their embassies in Kaunas, Riga and Tallinn be closed by August 11, and all consulates on the territory of the former Baltic republics should be liquidated by September 1.

Hitler felt humiliated, but could no longer do anything but throw another tantrum at Ribbentrop. Hitler was generally in a gloomy mood. The reason for this, first of all, was the death in France from a stray bullet of one of the princes - the sons of Kaiser Wilhelm, who is living his life in Holland. Around Germany

a rumor immediately spread that the prince had been murdered on Hitler's orders, as the Gestapo had uncovered a major monarchist conspiracy in the army. The fact that his armed forces remained Prussian-monarchical in spirit, Hitler knew perfectly well, but he had nothing to do with the death of the prince. The rumors upset him.

It seemed to everyone that in Compiègne, in the old carriage of Marshal Foch, when signing the surrender of the French, Hitler was at the height of his triumph and was in the finest mood. But it only seemed. When he arrived in Compiègne at about 3 pm on June 22, accompanied by Göring, Keitel, Brauchitsch, Ribbentrop and Hess, the first thing that caught his eye was an old memorial plaque set into the asphalt, on which was engraved: "Here November 11, 1918 year, the criminal pride of the German Empire, defeated by the free people whom they tried to enslave, was defeated.

Standing under the rays of the June sun, Hitler and his retinue silently read the inscription on the memorial plaque. Blood rushed to Hitler's head, his face contorted with anger, hatred, a thirst for revenge and an experienced triumph. He stood on the stove and defiantly wiped his feet on it in front of the camera lenses. But the terrible, defiant inscription did not give rest and stood before my eyes all the time. He was no longer glad that he had thought of holding this whole ceremony in Compiègne. Entering the car and sitting in the very chair where Foch had sat 22 years ago, dictating the terms of surrender to the Germans, Hitler was never able to regain his good mood. When the French delegation was brought in and Keitel began to read out the terms of the armistice to them in his raspy voice, Hitler, without listening to the end, left the car and left Compiègne.

Not pleased and a friend - Mussolini. On June 10, he declared war on France and England, but a rare farce broke out on the Alpine front, occupied by Italian troops. For ten days after the declaration of war, the Italians were completely inactive, waiting for the Germans to approach the French army of the Alps from the rear. The Italians had to sharply point out that nominal participation in the war alone would not give them their rightful place at the peace negotiating table. Frightened, Mussolini ordered the troops to go on the offensive, frankly telling his chief of staff: "Italy needs several thousand dead in order to take a seat at the peace conference table as a belligerent country and present its demands to France."

The case nearly ended in disaster. Having defeated the Italians to smithereens, the French launched a counteroffensive and would certainly have occupied a good part of Northern Italy if they had not been forced to capitulate under the swift onslaught of German troops.

I constantly had to recall the wise words of Moltke Jr., which he said to the Kaiser before the start of the First World War, when in Berlin they could not say with certainty which side Italy would take. "Your Majesty," the Chief of the General Staff cynically remarked, "if they come out on our side, then it will take five divisions to help them, if against us, then the same five divisions to defeat them. So basically this question is not
doesn't matter."

Not really counting on the Italians on land, Hitler still hoped that they would alleviate his plight at sea. Nothing happened! The British continued to make themselves at home in the Mediterranean.

It was at this moment that the message came that Stalin had occupied the Baltic states, reaching the borders of East Prussia. This was followed by a sharp note demanding the closure of the German representations in the Baltics. An enraged Hitler immediately ordered the closing of the Soviet embassy in Paris and the dispatch of all Soviet diplomats to Vichy. Before Hitler had time to recover from Stalin's dashing actions in the Baltics, a new surprise awaited him. On June 23, 1940, von Schulenburg sent a telegram to Berlin from Moscow,

which sounded panic notes:

"Urgently! Molotov made the following statement to me today. The settlement of the Bessarabian question cannot bear further delay. The Soviet government is still trying to resolve the issue peacefully, but it intends to use force if the Romanian government rejects the peace agreement. Soviet claims also extend to Bukovina, where the Ukrainian population lives ... "

Back in May, information began to come to Berlin about a dangerous concentration of Soviet troops on the Romanian border. German intelligence reported that in Kyiv, on the basis of the administration of the Kyiv Special Military District, a field administration of the Southern Front was secretly created. This front, in addition to the troops of the Kyiv district, included many parts of the Odessa military district. The command of this secret front was entrusted to the commander of the Kyiv district, General Zhukov. Intelligence managed to get a copy of the secret order that came from Kyiv to the headquarters of the 49th Rifle Corps, concentrated in the Kamenetz-Podolsk region. The order clearly spoke of the upcoming "reunification" of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. While expressing the hope that things would work out peacefully, the command of the corps was nonetheless asked to prepare for combat operations. For this purpose, appropriate command and staff exercises were held.

All this, in principle, was not a surprise for the Germans, because the secret protocol to the treaty of August 23, 1939 clearly stated:

"Regarding South-Eastern Europe, the Soviet side indicated its interest in Bessarabia. The German side has clearly stated its complete political disinterest in these territories.

The historical background of the question was also quite clear. In the old days, Bessarabia belonged to the Russian Empire. During the years of the civil war, the Red Army, passing through Bessarabia, made an attempt to invade the territory of the Romanian kingdom on the move in order to promote the proletarian revolution in Romania itself and to support the dying regime of Bela Kun in Hungary. Defeated in the vanguard battles, torn apart by popular uprisings in the rear, the Red Army was forced to roll back to the east, leaving Bessarabia in Romanian hands.

In subsequent years, there was a tedious litigation between Romania and the USSR. The fact is that during the First World War, the government of Romania, not without reason fearing the occupation of the country by the Kaiser or Austro-Hungarian troops, was foolish to transfer the gold reserves of the kingdom to Russia for storage. Faithful to the Leninist principle "steal the loot", the Soviet side did not even want to hear anything about the return of gold. Romania declared that it would not give up Bessarabia. Well, choke - this is how Moscow generally reacted to the arguments of Bucharest, but did not take its eyes off Bessarabia, sending its agents there, decomposing the local population with tales of socialism. However, the bloody terror that raged in the neighborhood, the terror accompanied by a terrible famine, told the Bessarabian peasants about the charms of socialism better than any Moscow agitation.

The question concerning Bessarabia was clear to the Germans. But what does Bukovina have to do with it, which never belonged to Russia. This is first. And secondly, the presence of Soviet troops on the territory of Bukovina created a direct threat to the rapid capture of oil wells in the Ploiesti basin, all of whose production went to Germany, providing, together with

supplies from the USSR 87% of the needs of the German armed forces in fuel.

But what could be done now, when the whole army is in the open spaces of France and there is nothing to counter Stalin's appetites, except for a diplomatic squabble, and even then trying to express himself as politely as possible? On June 25, Ribbentrop sends an urgent telegram to Schulenburg in Moscow:

"Please visit Molotov and tell him the following:

1. Germany remains true to the Moscow agreements. Therefore, she does not show interest in the Bessarabian issue ...
2. The claims of the Soviet government regarding Bukovina are something new. Bukovina was the territory of the Austrian crown and densely populated by Germans. The fate of these ethnic Germans is also of great concern to Germany...
3. Fully sympathetic to the settlement of the Bessarabian question, the imperial government at the same time hopes that, in accordance with the Moscow agreements The Soviet Union, in cooperation with the Romanian government, will be able to resolve this issue peacefully ... "

The Germans were alarmed in earnest. A deliberate leak of information organized by Soviet intelligence made them understand that if Romania resisted, Soviet aircraft would deliver a powerful blow to the oil fields.

On the same day, Schulenburg, after visiting Molotov, telegraphed to Berlin:

"Urgently!

I followed the instructions, met with Molotov today at 9 o'clock in the evening. Molotov expressed his gratitude for the understanding and readiness shown by the German government to support the demands of the Soviet Union. Molotov stated that the Soviet government also desired a peaceful resolution of the issue, but reiterated the fact that the issue was extremely urgent and could not bear further delay. I pointed out to Molotov that the Soviets' renunciation of Bukovina, which had never even belonged to Tsarist Russia, would greatly contribute to a peaceful solution. Molotov objected, saying that Bukovina is the last missing part of a united Ukraine ... "

The Romanian government, well aware of how two insatiable predators are negotiating behind its back, appealed for help to one of them - Hitler, clearly preferring him to Stalin. Despite the ongoing fighting in France, Hitler orders the transfer of several infantry and tank divisions to the east. The order, of course, gets stuck somewhere in the headquarters of Field Marshal Rundstedt, but Stalin's reaction to it was instantaneous. On the same day, Schulenburg was again urgently summoned to the Kremlin.

In the early morning of June 26, another telegram flies to Berlin:

"Very urgent!

Molotov summoned me again today and stated that the Soviet government, based on his (Molotov's) conversation with me yesterday, decided

limit their claims to the northern part of Bukovina with the city of Chernivtsi ... Molotov added that the Soviet government expects Germany to support these Soviet demands. In response to my statement that a peaceful solution to the problem could be achieved more easily if the Soviet government would return to Rumania the gold reserves of the Romanian National Bank, transferred to Moscow for safekeeping during the First World War, Molotov declared that this could not be speech, since Romania exploited Bessarabia for a long time ...

Molotov went on to say that the Soviet government expected the German Empire to immediately advise the Rumanian government to submit to Soviet demands, otherwise war would

inevitable."

In rage and impotent rage, Hitler crumples the papers on his desk. The shadow of the Kremlin falls too clearly on Europe, and he, drawn into the war in the West, is powerless to do anything. He again begins to realize the size of the gigantic trap into which he was driven. On the one hand, still undefeated England, on the other, friend Stalin, whose intentions are no longer in doubt.

Ribbentrop is trying to calm the Fuhrer, reminding him that everything was provided for by the Moscow agreements. "No!" Hitler yells back. "Nothing of the kind was foreseen!" It was only about eastern Poland, and he was already at the gates of East Prussia and set his sights on the Balkans. I feel that this Kremlin scoundrel understands only the language of force! Can we send enough troops to Romania?" No we can not. There are no forces, and the Russians intend to resolve the Bessarabian issue within the next few days. So anyway, Molotov told Schulenburg. In a few days, nothing will be able to be transferred and deployed in Romania.

The Germans naively thought they still had a few more days. They soon became convinced that the pace set by Stalin was far ahead of their strategic calculations. Barely having time to send Schulenburg out, Molotov on the same day, June 26, summoned the Romanian envoy G. Davidescu to him and made the following statement to him:

"In 1918, Romania, taking advantage of the military weakness of Russia, forcibly seized from the Soviet Union (Russia) part of its territory - Bessarabia ...

The government of the USSR considers that the question of the return of Bessarabia is organically linked with the question of the transfer to the Soviet Union of that part of Bukovina, the vast majority of whose population is connected with Soviet Ukraine both by a common historical destiny, and a common language and national composition.

The Romanians were given 12 hours to think. On the morning of June 27, they were supposed to give an answer. A huge army was already roaring with tank engines at the eastern borders of Romania. The Romanian army was waiting for the order, although they assessed their chances quite soberly, knowing that the first air strike would not be on them, but on the oil fields of Ploiesti.

Presenting an ultimatum to the Romanians, Molotov immediately informed Schulenburg about this. Schulenburg immediately telegraphed Ribbentrop. After reading the telegram, Hitler sighed and

waved his hand, and after Ribbentrop left, he remarked to his chief of staff, General Jodl, that it would be nice to develop an operation to crush the Soviet Union militarily. Jodl raised his eyebrows in surprise and asked the Fuhrer if his words should be considered as an order. Hitler did not answer and began to feed grains to his beloved canary Sisi.

In the meantime, Ribbentrop telephoned his envoy in Bucharest and gave him the following instruction:

"You are instructed to immediately visit the Minister of Foreign Affairs (of Romania) and inform him of the following:

"The Soviet government has informed us that it demands from the Romanian government the transfer of Bessarabia and the northern part of Bukovina to the USSR. In order to avoid a war between Romania and the Soviet Union, we can only advise the Romanian government to give in to the demands of the Soviet Union ... "

On the morning of June 27, Davidescu, the Romanian envoy in Moscow, announced his government's "readiness" to start negotiations with the USSR on the Bessarabian issue. No negotiations, Molotov snapped, demanding a "clear and precise answer" - yes or no. Davidescu tried to say something about Bukovina, but was forced to shut up when he was shown a document dated as early as November 1918, which stated that "the people's council of Bukovina, reflecting the will of the people, decided to join Soviet Ukraine." Squeezed between Soviet ultimatums and German Soviets, the Romanian government, realizing the hopelessness of its situation, ordered the army to withdraw in an organized manner to the new border, without offering resistance to the Red Army.

On June 28, Soviet tank and cavalry units poured across the Romanian border. The troops were on a forced march. Undercover intelligence reported with alarm that almost the entire population of Bessarabia and Bukovina had left their places and were fleeing to the West. This could not be allowed under any circumstances, for who needs land without slaves? In some areas, airborne assault forces were dropped to intercept refugees, setting up checkpoints on the roads.

In the midst of all these events, when a frightened Hitler rushed around his office, looking with fear at a map that clearly showed how the Soviet Union, like a giant press, was slowly but surely pressed into Europe, clearly aiming at the Balkans, East Prussia and the very heart of the Reich, the news from Moscow continued to amaze with its formidable consistency.

On June 25, in the midst of the Romanian crisis, a message arrived about the unexpected establishment of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia. The Soviet ambassador Plotnikov went to Belgrade. Familiar with the methods of work of the Soviet embassies, the Germans were alarmed. There were strong pro-Soviet currents in Yugoslavia, ready at any moment to open the country to Stalin's army. The General Staff was ordered to urgently develop a plan for the occupation of Yugoslavia, if necessary. But Stalin asked

frantic pace, to which it was already very difficult to respond without pulling the army out of France.

On June 26, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR "On the transition to an eight-hour working day, a seven-day working week and the prohibition of unauthorized departure of workers and employees from enterprises and institutions" is published in Moscow.

The decree established criminal liability for absenteeism (being late for work more than 20 minutes was equated with absenteeism) and unauthorized leaving of work.

In secret party directives, issued a little later as a decision of the plenum of the Central Committee, it was explained that directors of enterprises should make full use of the power granted to them and not be afraid to impose discipline through repression, not be liberal with truants, but mercilessly bring them to justice.

This decree, unprecedented in peacetime, spoke eloquently of the fact that Stalin openly transferred the entire industry of the country to a military footing, finally turning "the world's first country of socialism" into a huge concentration camp. Millions of undocumented collective farmers attached to state land became serfs as a result of general collectivization. The introduction of the passport system and propiska attached all other residents of the country to their place of residence. And the new decree attached them to their places of work. And the gigantic country of serfs sang in chorus of two hundred million people: "I don't know another such country where a person breathes so freely!"

In order to carry out the world campaign conceived by Stalin, everything that was considered unnecessary for the "last and decisive battle" was cut off, eliminated and ruthlessly destroyed. Naturally, the subject of special concern was the army, which, in Stalin's quite fair opinion, needed a radical restructuring from top to bottom. And it began without delay, and in the best traditions of that heroic era.

On June 8, 1940, the newly minted Marshal Timoshenko addressed the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks with a note in which Comrade Stalin was mildly reproached that the punishments for military crimes provided for by the Criminal Code because of their incomprehensible liberalism "do not contribute to strengthening discipline in the Red Army". For example, those who arbitrarily left the unit and were absent from it for more than six days are considered deserters. Marshal proposed to change this period to 6 hours.

On June 11, Tymoshenko issues another historic order "On the elimination of outrages and the establishment of a strict regime in guardhouses."

On June 12, his order appears on the introduction of disciplinary battalions in the Red Army, which almost coincides in time with the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council "On criminal liability for unauthorized absences and desertion", which provides for the direction of conscripts for unauthorized absences to disciplinary battalions for a period of 3 months up to 2 years.

From the new decree it is very difficult to understand where "AWOL" ends and desertion begins, for which execution is laid. Everything, as in "citizenship", where the head of the shop is given the right to decide whether being late for work for half an hour was absenteeism (from one to five years in prison), an attempt to disorganize production (from ten years in the camps to execution), or economic sabotage with signs terrorism (unconditional execution).

In addition to the Gulag archipelago, disciplinary battalions began to flourish throughout the country.

As a result of all these measures, the army, terrorized by special departments of the NKVD, began to terrorize itself from the inside. Desperate attempts to reinforce discipline by any means were accompanied by a series of numerous orders trying to increase the extremely low level of combat training.

The famous order of Tymoshenko No. 120 of May 16 openly set the task for the war: "Teach the troops only what is needed in the war, and only as it is done in the war." The army did not know peace day or night. By special order, the so-called "training" hours, i.e. working hours were increased: in the cavalry - up to 9 hours, in mechanized units - up to 10 hours, in the infantry - even up to 12 hours. The order required the use of at least 30% of "training time" at night. There were practically no days off, because they were all given to cross-country races, swims, races, etc. The size of the army, having already exceeded 4 million, was constantly growing.

According to the charter, the daily passage with full gear was 40-45 kilometers. However, the entire plan for the occupation of Europe was based on the rapid advance of infantry units, which, due to the low mobility of the army, caused by a catastrophic shortage of not only automobile, but also horse-drawn transport, was supposed to be carried out on soldier's feet. Therefore, hundred-kilometer marches began to be practiced everywhere. In rain, mud, under the scorching sun, infantry columns marched across the country. Ambulances and trucks followed them, picking up the unconscious. Instead of food rations, there were bricks in the backpacks of the soldiers. Along with the full gear, the soldiers, changing in turn, carried huge anti-tank rifles and heavy machine guns, and sometimes boxes of ammunition. The units that returned to the location fell dead next to their bunks. I didn't even have the energy to fix myself. Meanwhile, for being late from dismissal for 15 minutes, the Red Army soldier was put on trial. The tribunals raged. Desertions and suicides skyrocketed. Battering flourished, which even the army of Nicholas I did not know.

Stacks of top secret documents of particular importance lie on Stalin's desk. With the perseverance instilled in the seminary, he thoughtfully reads each of them, dotting them with his remarks. It was Alexander II who somehow, without reading, waved the order to appoint Metropolitan Filaret as commander of the Grenadier Regiment. This cannot happen to Stalin. Everything he writes, he writes himself or dictates to Poskrebyshv, not trusting any referents. He reads all documents in the most attentive way, sometimes placing missing commas, which gives him special pleasure. Documents are urgent and urgent.

"Strictly secret. Of particular importance. On the organization and strength of the Red Army.

Everything seems to be provided. The pencil runs along the lines. You also need to add an item:

"In total, 766,000 people will be attracted to the training camp this year, not counting the 234,000 people currently undergoing training camps. To provide training fees, allocate 145,600 annual food rations to NGOs."

Those who came to the training camp will no longer be released from the army until 1946. The first stage of the secret mobilization of reservists began. It is called collections for German intelligence.

following documents.

"Owls. secret. Of particular importance. On the production of T-34 tanks in 1940 ... To oblige the People's Commissar of Medium Machine Building Comrade Likhachev I.A. to produce 600 T-34 tanks in 1940..."

"Owls. secret. Of particular importance. On increasing the production of aircraft and aircraft engines ... "

"Owls. secret. On the organization of the structure of the Air Force of the Red Army ... "

"Owls. secret. Of particular importance. NCOs are allowed to form 23 new rifle divisions of 3,000 men each. In accordance with this, the Red Army has 200 divisions ... "

"Owls. secret. Of particular importance. On the production of KB tanks ... Approve the plan for the production of KB tanks in the amount of 1200 units, including 1000 units for the Kirov plant of Narkomtyazhmash. and for the Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant of Narkomsredmash - 200 units ... "

"Owls. secret. Of particular importance. On the program of military shipbuilding.

Currently under construction:

at the plant number 402 in Molotovsk - the battleship "Soviet Russia",

at plant number 194 in Leningrad, the heavy cruiser Kronstadt,

at the plant number 200 in Nikolaev heavy cruiser "Sevastopol",

at the plant number 198 in Nikolaev, the battleship "Soviet Ukraine",

at the plant number 402 in Molotovsk, the battleship "Soviet Belarus",

at plant number 189 in Leningrad, the battleship "Soviet Union" ... "

"To fully ensure the 1940 program for equipping T-34 tanks with diesel engines, for which purpose to increase the production of V-2 engines at plant No. 75 and produce 2000 units by the end of 1940 ..."

"Increase the production of combat aircraft by 1941 to 20,000 pieces ... Oblige the NKAP to produce fighters with a range of at least 1000 km at 0.9 maximum speed ... Oblige the directors of the engine and aircraft factories of the NKAP ... to give daily messages to the Central Committee

Chapter 5

In Berlin everyone looked to the East with greater anxiety. Informative reports about Stalin's military preparations were neatly placed on General Halder's desk and reported to the Fuhrer. Sometimes these reports were not entirely accurate in detail, but they conveyed the essence of the matter absolutely correctly: Stalin, apparently, had completely lost his prudence and was openly preparing the country for a big war. If the Stalinist horde surges into Europe, it will not be able to hold it back. And things are clearly moving towards this. The only thing that can be done is to deliver a preemptive blow to Stalin. But this is easier said than done.

After the capitulation of France, there was a general feeling in Germany that the war was ending. Hitler himself shared this mood, ordering the demobilization of 40 divisions out of 160 on June 15. Driving around the memorable places of the battles of the First World War, in which he personally took part, he noticed Max Ammann, who was accompanying him, a former sergeant major of the same company where the Fuhrer served, now - to a major Nazi publisher that the continuation of the war against England does not interest him at all, since, in his opinion, common sense will surely win out among the British and they will go to peace negotiations. Max Ammann respectfully inquired: does this mean that the war is over? Hitler replied in the affirmative, noting that he was very pleased with such a quick end to the war compared to the previous one and with the minimal losses that Germany suffered, while achieving such brilliant successes.

Reflecting Hitler's thoughts, Jodl's deputy, Colonel Walter Warlimont, officially replied to the request of the naval headquarters regarding the continuation of the war with England as follows: "Until now, the Fuhrer has not expressed any intention of landing in England ... no preparatory work." A similar response came from the Wehrmacht General Staff, which said: "The General Staff does not deal with the issue of landing in England, considering such an operation impossible." The Navy, which back in November 1939 was assigned to carry out the theoretical development of the problem of the "invasion" of England, also dealt with this problem without any enthusiasm, knowing better than other services how much the Germans were unable to carry out such a landing operation. Hitler also knew this, who, as you know, hated England in general, but was very respectful of the British fleet and panicked at every appearance on the scene. Wanting to end the war as soon as possible, on June 11, when the defeat of France was no longer in doubt, Hitler gave an interview to the German journalist Karl von Wignad to inform the world that his, Hitler's, intentions did not include any hostile actions against the Western Hemisphere, that he does not want the destruction of the British Empire, and insists only on the removal from his post of "warmonger Churchill."

On June 18, Ribbentrop, in a conversation with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Ciano, as if confidentially informed him that England should only recognize as a *fait accompli* the establishment of German domination on the European continent, give up the colonies that belonged to Germany, captured by the British during the First World War and conclude a new agreement with Germany. trade agreement. Under these conditions, England will immediately receive peace. Otherwise, Ribbentrop bluffed, England would be destroyed. Expecting to make peace with England and induce France to future cooperation, Hitler and the French decided not to set too harsh conditions. As usual, only Alsace and Lorraine were taken from France. The colonies remained in French hands, the fleet was subject only to disarmament,

army - demobilization.

It was at this moment that Hitler learned about the events in the East, where the Stalinist offensive to the West began to develop rapidly. Intelligence reported with alarm about the increased activity of Soviet troops in the Transcaucasus, where the operators of the General Staff began to survey Turkish territory, about the activity of the Red Black Sea Fleet off the coast of Romania and Bulgaria, as well as near the Turkish straits. In the Baltic, after the capture of the Baltic, the activity of the Russian fleet also increased dramatically, growing at an incredible pace. We must immediately transfer the army to the East. But England does not react in any way to peace proposals. Through the service of Walter Schellenberg, the Germans keep in touch with the Duke of Windsor, who lives in Lisbon, the former English King Edward VIII, who left the throne because of his love for the American film actress. The brother of King George IV does not hide his pro-German sympathies. He considers the war with Germany to be the national tragedy of England. If he had remained on the throne, this would never have happened. Using his vast connections in London, the duke is trying to induce his former subjects to prudence and recognition of the realities of the existing world.

England is silent, looking to the East. For three hundred years of its existence, British intelligence has entangled the whole world with its tentacles. The British understand better than others what is happening in Moscow.

Having started the movement, Stalin will still be able to slow down for a while, but he will no longer be able to stop. This is evidenced by all his behavior and the country's militarization program, unprecedented in the history of mankind. He will no doubt crush this Berlin clown. But then it will be necessary to stop him too, because Stalin, inflamed, can reach the Atlantic. Which is better - Europe under Hitler or Europe under Stalin? "The main thing is to destroy Hitler," Churchill said. "If Hitler threatened hell, I would immediately make an alliance with the devil!"

On June 30, General Jodl presents to the Führer a memorandum on the military capabilities of England at the present time, which directly states:

"The final victory of Germany over England is only a matter of time ... Large-scale offensive operations of the enemy are no longer possible."

On July 1, Hitler, speaking to the activists of the Labor Front, openly offers peace to England. He emphasizes that there is no reason to continue the war. Germany is ready to withdraw its troops from France, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark and Norway, giving these countries "complete freedom of national development." In the voice of the Führer, exculpatory notes that were not previously characteristic of him sound. What exactly does he require? Never mind. Old German colonies? Isn't that fair? Recognize Germany's right to Alsace, Lorraine, Western Poland, Bohemia and Austria? Are these not original German territories, torn away from Germany at various times by force of arms? So why should two great European nations kill each other?

The British response was completely unexpected for Hitler. On July 3, formations of the English Mediterranean Fleet under the command of Admiral Sommerville attacked the French naval bases in Oran and Dakar. England decided to insure herself against the unpleasant and dangerous prospect of the Germans seizing the French fleet or using it, with the approval of the defeatist government of Marshal Petain, for the war against England. The action was carefully filmed by newsreel and slipped to Hitler ...

Here they are: arrogant and majestic, like English lords from ancient paintings, the world's largest warship - the battlecruiser Hood. Behind him is the battleship Valliant, which has passed through the fiery tornado of Jutland. Next - "Resolution" - camouflage

armored mass of post-Jutland construction. Red crosses of St. George on white flags. Spewing sheaves of fire, the terrible muzzles of fifteen-inch guns. God, how familiar! Flaming French ships. They explode, fall on board, run aground. Some ships are trying to escape from the harbor engulfed in flames. English torpedo bombers in the air. New explosions, raging flames, rushing figures of people...

Hitler rested his hands on the arms of the chair, as if preparing to jump out of it. Slit eyes, like those of a furious panther. Thin lips stretched and tremble. Mustache bristles. He had never been so frankly spit in his face, and at that very moment when, as it seemed to him, he was full of the kindest and best intentions. Damn England! He would make her pay dearly for such humiliation! But that is not all. The gloomy figure of Churchill appears on the screen. Next to him is some lanky and long-nosed French general. French soldiers with carbines "on guard". French and English flags flying in the wind. The words "free France", "fighting France", "we will fight to the end, until the complete destruction of Hitler" dimly reach Hitler. Parade. They're coming French, Polish, Czech, Dutch and Norwegian soldiers. The remnants of the armies defeated and destroyed by the Wehrmacht, who fled to England in different ways. Clownery! Churchill watches from the screen without a smile, smoking a cigar, leaning on a cane. He is gloomy.

Hitler is furious and confused. He then runs around his office, then sits crouched at the table, clasp his head in his hands. The intelligence summary report for June is not uplifting. Some fundamentally new types of weapons are being tested at secret ranges. Information is fragmentary. Experts tend to think that we are talking about some kind of thermite weapons. A large amount of chemical weapons is being stockpiled. Somewhere beyond the Urals, experiments are being conducted with bacteriological weapons. Launched in a series of new tanks of monstrous power. A fundamentally new type of jet-powered fighter is being tested. The Kiev Military District is preparing for major maneuvers. Secret tests of a new type of parachute for the airborne troops. Stalin signed an order to bring the number of airborne troops to a million people in the near future ...

England quickly recovers from the Dunker shock, in which the basis of her power, the fleet, was practically not affected at all. New ships are under construction, including several battleships, heavy cruisers and large aircraft carriers. The aircraft factories have increased the pace of work. The activity of British intelligence in the Balkans and the Middle East increased markedly. There is an obvious danger of English provocations in order to force Hitler to take ill-conceived retaliatory actions. England has actually acquired a new ally for itself - the United States, whose neutrality, apparently, is turning into a piece of paper. Raw materials and armaments flow from the USA to England, hidden under the flag of American neutrality. Any detention of their ships is inflated by the Americans into an international scandal.

In the United States itself, there is a growing tendency to build up military power. It is planned to increase the production of aircraft up to 50,000 a year. Construction of new military bases is planned. Informed sources believe that Roosevelt will eventually pass a law on universal conscription in order to bring the US military to 4-6 million people.

Thus, all of the above suggests that the United States intends to oppose Germany as soon as they can deploy the necessary military forces for this. Tentatively this can happen in mid-1942 or early 1943

of the year. Around the same time, the complete rearmament of the Red Army is expected and the British will bring their naval and military power to incomparable with the Germans. states.

Hitler concludes that there is a new encirclement of Germany by a coalition of superpowers controlled by the forces of international Jewry. These forces behind Churchill and Roosevelt are now being mobilized not only to frustrate Germany's historical tasks, but to destroy Germany as a state. It is in their voice that Churchill broadcasts, rejecting peace proposals and speaking of the "destruction of Hitlerism." Moreover, at the present time, the tendency of an alliance between the forces of Jewish plutocratic capital and Bolshevism is emerging more and more strongly ...

It can be said with certainty that these forces will not enter into any peace negotiations with Germany, no matter what conditions the German government sets, for their goal is dominion over the world ... A war of annihilation is being imposed on the German Empire, and if time is lost, the prospect of this struggle looks very bleak, given the catastrophic disparity of power in all areas, from human resources to the availability of strategic raw materials and industrial capabilities ...

Therefore, before the summer of 1942, i.e., before the supposed date for the final readiness for war of the United States, it is necessary to put an end to England and Russia, and then, speeding up the program of naval construction, together with Japan and Italy, attack the United States, thus crushing , the last bastion of international Jewry in the world and to give the German people a worthy future...

Hitler sits in thought. The summer breeze, breaking through the heavy curtains, stirs the sheets of the report, covered with top secret stamps of various services that took part in its compilation. There is nothing to object. Of course, the Jews! They united against him because he took from them in Germany money and wealth, sucked along with the blood of the German people. Because he stopped their boundless arbitrariness! Because they killed his mother with the wrong treatment! They ruined his talent as an artist! He will never forget their cheeky smirks at the Vienna Art Academy! And now they want to completely destroy it! Here she is, plump, studded with gold rings and diamond rings, a disgusting hand reaching for his throat. Another attack of suffocation. The excited faces of the adjutants, the faithful Morrel with a syringe in his hand, cold perspiration on his forehead ...

So, the enemies surround him, but until this environment is completed, there is still a chance to defeat them one by one or turn them into allies. Obviously, the main enemy is Stalin. First of all, you need to deal with him. To do this, it is necessary to concentrate sufficient forces on the eastern borders to defeat the Stalinist army in the course of a short, lightning-fast operation, say, this autumn. Unreal. During this time, the necessary forces cannot be concentrated and deployed. Okay, next spring then. And what if Stalin, seeing the concentration of such large forces on his borders, himself strikes a preemptive strike even before the Wehrmacht is fully prepared for the invasion? It must be deceived by launching a global disinformation operation, hiding the direction of the main attack.

Make sure that he is sure that we will strike at England, while in reality we will strike at Stalin. Risky? Yes. But if the Stalinist horde invades Europe, having already now an overwhelming superiority in people, tanks and aircraft, then it will not be stopped! It can only be defeated with a devastating surprise blow.

Keitel, Jodl, Halder and Brauchitsch, who were present at the meeting, represented the army, Heydrich, Canaris and Schellenberg - intelligence services, Goering, Ribbentrop and Hess -

party. Characteristically, there was no Himmler, who was in Austria, and no one from the fleet. Everyone present was silent in concentration, considering the proposed plan, which in essence boiled down to the following: begin noisy preparations for the invasion of the British Isles, and under the guise of this preparation, concentrate troops on the Soviet border and crush Stalin. If, in the course of measures directed against England to disinform Stalin, it is possible to force England to capitulate or make peace, then so much the better. But a blow to Russia must be struck in any case. Apart from those present, not a single living soul, regardless of position or rank, should know about this operation, the code name of which will henceforth be "Harpoon". In the course of Operation Harpoon, it is desirable to destroy the air force of England and at least somehow weaken its naval forces, while avoiding unnecessary losses. The illusion of a possible landing must be complete in order to keep England and the whole world, especially Stalin, in constant tension and expectation.

What happened next was, as it were, a surprise that struck almost the entire command of the armed forces and especially the command of the fleet, which everything that follows will take at face value. However, the Luftwaffe command was not in the best position. Goering, of course, did not inform even his closest employees about the plan, but with his usual irresponsibility he managed to promise the Fuhrer to crush the British aviation in a maximum of three weeks. Everyone still remembered very well how quite recently, on July 13, at a meeting in the Berghof, Hitler, speaking to representatives of the command of all branches of the military, spoke quite openly about the undesirability of further waging war against England and wondered why she was not looking for peace. "If we defeat England militarily, then the entire British Empire will fall apart," the Fuhrer argued his position, "however, Germany will not gain anything from this. The defeat of England will be achieved at the cost of German blood, and Japan, America and others will reap the rewards. Everyone, in principle, agreed with this and rejoiced at such a rational thinking of their Fuhrer.

And just three days later, i.e. On July 16, 1940, the generals and admirals, until recently so satisfied with the logical thinking of their Fuhrer, receive Directive No. 16 signed by Hitler with the following content:

"The Fuhrer and

Supreme Commander

armed forces

Fuhrer headquarters

July 16, 1940

7 copies

Strictly secret!

Directive No. 16

ON THE PREPARATION OF A LANDING OPERATION AGAINST ENGLAND

Since England, in spite of her hopeless military situation, still shows no signs of being ready for a peace agreement, I have decided to prepare for a landing operation against England and carry it out if necessary. The purpose of this operation is the destruction of the English metropolis as a base for further warfare against Germany, and, if necessary, its complete occupation ... "

Further, the directive stated that the implementation of the operation, which received the code name "Sea Lion", should be carried out by a sudden crossing of the English Channel on a wide front approximately from Rameget to the area west of about. White. As prerequisites for landing on the territory of England, it was indicated: the defeat of the enemy air force, "so that they could not offer noticeable resistance to the German operation", the creation of mine-free routes, the preparation of minefields on the flanks of the landing routes, as well as the shackling of the British naval forces in North and Mediterranean seas.

The command of the ground forces was given the task of developing an operational plan for the transfer of first-echelon formations, distributing crossing facilities, and establishing, together with the headquarters of the Navy, areas for loading and unloading. The command of the naval forces was instructed to develop an operational plan, provide and bring to the loading areas crossing facilities in an amount that meets the requirements of the ground forces, provide protection for the operation from the flanks, and prepare coastal artillery. The preparation of the operation was required to be completed by mid-August. Field Marshals Brauchitsch and Rundstedt, having read the directive, outwardly remained completely calm. It is possible that Brauchitsch, who knew the whole truth, hinted to his old friend that he should not be particularly worried - there would be no landing. And Rundstedt's own experience was quite enough to understand the absolute practical impracticability of the Sea Lion operation [22].

Therefore, already on July 17, i.e. less than a day after receiving the directive, the command of the ground forces issued a special directive for the invasion of Army Group "B" consisting of the 16th, 9th and 6th armies. In the famously drawn up operational plan, in every line of which there is a hope that it will not be implemented, everything was clear and simple. Six infantry divisions of General Ernest Bush's 16th Army, embarking on transports in the Pas de Calais area, seize bridgeheads between Ramosget and Bexhill. Four divisions of the 9th Army of General Adolf Strauss, having made a throw across the English Channel from the Le Havre area, land between Brighton and the Isle of Wight. To the west, three divisions of Field Marshal von Reichenau's 6th Army, leaving Cherbourg, land in Laimi Bay. In total, 90 thousand people land on the bridgeheads of the southern coast of England in the first wave, and on the third day of the operation their number should increase to 200 thousand. Six tank and three motorized divisions landed in the second wave, and on the fourth day of the operation 39 divisions were concentrated on the bridgeheads, not counting the two airborne divisions thrown ahead of the first wave with the task of disorganizing communications and control centers in the operational rear of the enemy.

How all this will be delivered to the bridgeheads - the army was not interested. That's what the navy is for. The army is ready. But the fleet, represented by Grand Admiral Raeder, immediately began to throw tantrums. As soon as he read Directive No. 16, Raeder rushed to Brauchitsch and bluntly told him that the naval command did not see a real opportunity to prepare the fleet for Operation Sea Lion by mid-August. Moreover, the tasks set by the directive do not correspond at all to the state of the fleet. Ground forces are already concentrated in Belgium and Northern France, aviation is deployed at French and Belgian airfields, and the fleet will have to completely regroup forces, change

basing, creation of new parking lots. In addition, the army plan does not take into account such factors as the weather: fogs, storms, currents. This plan somehow does not take into account the English fleet, which is three times stronger than ours! Brauchitsch listens to the admiral with an impenetrable face. The Fuhrer's order is non-negotiable. The problems of the fleet are of little interest to the army.

In a panic, Raeder makes his way at an inopportune time for an appointment with the Fuhrer. Realizing that he is risking his career, the admiral officially declares to Hitler that by August 15 the fleet will by no means be ready to carry out an invasion of England. The admiral is overexcited, waiting for an explosion from the Fuhrer. But he gently takes him by the arm and takes him for a walk in a shady alley of ancient oaks - a favorite place for walking and thinking. Of course, he would not order an invasion unless the fleet was ready for it. Don't be nervous, my dear Raeder!

Hitler's directive No. 16 fell on Stalin's desk almost simultaneously with its arrival at Brauchitsch's office. Soviet intelligence turned out to be on top, although here one can clearly feel the disinterested help of the Germans. The leader carefully read the Fuhrer's directive and felt a surge of inspiration. What a fool! How wound up! If he sticks himself on the islands, then we will give him the back of the head. It is only necessary to create conditions for him so that he does not chicken out again at the last moment. Stalin calls the chief of intelligence, General Proskurov, and asks: does the Germans really have the possibility of invading the British Isles? "No," answers the direct and honest Proskurov, who allowed himself to quote Trotsky in the presence of Stalin. "They don't have any opportunity. It's a bluff from start to finish.

- Bluff? For what?

– Apparently, in order to intimidate England, to force her to a peace acceptable to Germany, to the recognition of German hegemony in Europe...

"But why do you still think an invasion is impossible?"

"Such an invasion," Proskurov explains to the leader, "depends on four main conditions:

First: the preliminary establishment of air supremacy by German aviation.

Second: ensuring dominance at sea, at least in the area of invasion and reliable fettering of the forces of the British fleet in the Atlantic and the North Sea.

Third: the availability of sufficient tonnage of landing equipment.

Fourth: the possibility of overcoming the coastal defenses and the resistance of the British troops in its depths.

Only by fulfilling all four conditions without exception, the Germans can hope for success. Without providing at least one of them, they will lose all chances.

Stalin listens without interrupting, carefully pacing around the office, as is his habit. Shaposhnikov, Meretskov and Timoshenko present at Proskurov's report are silent. They feel that Proskurov is not saying what the leader would like to hear.

According to our data, the British aviation industry produced 1,279 aircraft in May, 1,591 in June, and intends to produce about 1,700 this month. This is not counting the aircraft that are produced at American factories by order of the British.

At present, the Germans have concentrated no more than 600 Messerschmitt-109 fighters ready for battle and about 1,100 bombers of all types, including the two-seat Me-109 fighters used as bombers, at the airfields of Western Europe.

Thus, Proskurov continues, we see that the British fighter aircraft - the main means of fighting for air supremacy - are several times larger than the German ones, with the additional advantage that the British will have to fight over their bases, while the Germans will have to do that. the same on the last grams of fuel.

As for the second condition - ensuring dominance at sea - here the position of Germany looks generally unpromising. At present, the German fleet has only four cruisers and a number of destroyers, torpedo boats and minelayers in readiness. The English fleet, according to our data, has 5 battleships, 2 aircraft carriers, 11 cruisers and more than 80 destroyers in the waters of the mother country alone. In addition, it is reliably known that the coastal waters of Britain are covered by a dense zone of mines and other barriers. These waters are guarded by more than 700 small ships, of which 200-300 are constantly at sea. Forty formations of the fleet continuously patrol the waters between the Humber and Portsmouth.

Next - vehicles for the implementation of such a large landing. The Germans don't have them. The necessary quantity can only be provided by extensive mobilization of tonnage from the German economy, in particular from the Rhine. Such a mobilization will deal a very heavy blow to the German economy. In addition, even if Hitler goes to mobilize the tonnage, it will take at least three months to concentrate the required number of vehicles, i.e. sometime towards the end of October, when there can be no question of any landing due to weather conditions in the English Channel at this time of the year ... "

Stalin interrupts the report of the intelligence chief with a sharp and impatient movement of his hand with a pipe clamped in it. Everyone is silent. Stalin, walking around the office, begins to speak, not addressing anyone in particular, as if talking to himself: "In 1920, when Wrangel settled in the Crimea, military pest experts also assured us that Perekop was impregnable and that it would not be possible to take it. But we did not listen to these military experts, we shot them, and comrades Voroshilov and Frunze took Perekop ... "

Stalin is not in the least embarrassed by the fact that everyone present is well aware of how everything really happened, how the detachments of the peasant army of Makhno, deceived into the war against Wrangel, marched through the suddenly shallow Sivash.

"We took Perekop," Stalin continues thoughtfully, "because every communist, if he is a real communist, knows that the Red Army ..."

The leader falls silent in mid-sentence and turns to the already pale General Proskurov, who understood the leader's passage about military experts-saboteurs well:

"Quite recently, Comrade Proskurov, you assured us with your figures and data that the German offensive in the West would lead to a protracted and bloody war. Now you are also assuring us, trying to assure us that a landing in England is impossible. Thus, you are misleading the Politburo of the Central Committee ... "

On the same day, General Proskurov was removed from his post, a week later he was arrested, and in October 1941, when it turned out that this time he was absolutely right, he was shot. General Golikov was appointed the new chief of intelligence.

The sad fate of the unfortunate Proskurov clearly showed everyone what the leader wants.

The leader wants a German invasion of England. This determined the whole style of subsequent work. In the first report, General Golikov, refuting all the conclusions of his unlucky predecessor, proved to the leader that an invasion of England was not only possible, but simply inevitable and could happen on any next day.

Golikov frankly misled the leader. He had no data on the inevitability of the landing. On the contrary, he had a report from the Soviet naval attaché in Berlin, captain 1st rank Vorontsov, that sources in the top of the German fleet considered the landing unfeasible. The same was reported by the military attaché General Purkaev, who noticed the transfer of troops instead of northern France to eastern Poland.

The stubborn Soviet military attaché had already enough bothered the Germans. Having glued the last photograph of the amorous adventures of the dashing commander into the album, the Germans kindly send this album to Moscow, where Stalin, stroking his mustache, examines it with interest. Closing the album, Stalin comments on what he saw with the words: "Good, nothing to say!" and orders Golikov to call this "fellow" to Moscow. Unsuspecting, Purkaev comes to Golikov's office and asks the duty officer to report his arrival. Before the duty officer has time to do this, two Red Army soldiers with rifles appear and stand on both sides of the chair on which General Purkaev is waiting for an appointment. Time passes, but he is not taken anywhere, he continues to sit in the waiting room of his immediate superior, not knowing that he has been trying to get through to the Kremlin for three hours.

Finally, Filipp Golikov, red, angry and upset, goes into the waiting room. Without saying hello to Purkaev, he makes a sign to the guards to lead the military attaché behind him. Purkaev is led out into the yard, where they put him in a car. Purkaev does not remember how and where he was led until he ended up in Stalin's office. Oddly enough, when he saw the album, Purkaev calmed down and even began to explain to Stalin what kind of information he received from the naked girls depicted in the photographs. Stalin benevolently smiles into his mustache: "Apparently, you sniffed out something very interesting that they sent this album here. They hope that we will shoot you. But we, Comrade Purkaev, will not shoot you, but send you back to Berlin."

What does Purkaev think about the impending invasion of England? Is it possible? Of course, perhaps, the general replies confidently. It was about this that he learned from the patriotic girls instructed by the Gestapo, thanks to whom Purkaev appeared before the leader ...

A dark night hung over the blank walls of the Kuntsevo dacha, too dark for the July suburbs of Moscow, and at times it rains. Heavy drops drum on the roofs of summer cottages, rustle in the foliage of trees approaching the very walls. Three rings of external protection vigilantly serve at the barriers on the roads, in secret pickets and ambushes along the entire path. The internal security of the dacha is also on the alert, ready at any moment to illuminate the darkness of the night with the blinding light of searchlights hidden in the crowns of trees and bring down a shower of fire, specially trained shepherd dogs, on any intruder.

On duty, security officers know much more than they are supposed to know. They know about the mine found on the podium of the Mausoleum on the eve of the May Day parade in 1938, they also know about the mines that mysteriously appear on Stalin's route from the Kremlin to Kuntsevo, they also know about what no one is supposed to know about: about a night battle in just two kilometers from the dacha, which flared up on a blizzard night on February 3, 1930, when a group of unknown persons in the amount of 12 people who had clearly undergone special training tried to break through to the dacha. 37 security officers remained lying in the forest - the bullets of the unknown were covered with a layer of cyanide, causing a quick death with any hit. No one was taken alive. It was not even possible to establish whether there were 12 or more of them. The corpses were

somewhere, and then one by one, but all who took part in this battle quickly began to disappear. It was forbidden to mention him, but everyone who guarded Stalin's dacha in Kuntsevo knew about him.

There was complete silence, except for the sound of rain. Security must act silently, imperceptibly and with 100% reliability. Nothing should disturb the sleep of the leader in this stormy July predawn. But Stalin does not sleep. He sits in a deep chair, literally drowning in it. The light in the room is dimmed but not extinguished. The widened black eyes of the leader look into space with an unblinking gaze. A strange matte blush appears on the skin of the cheeks, which have completely lost their usual oiliness. The skin of the forehead is stretched so that the forehead seems larger than usual. Wrinkles are gone and the whole face looks amazingly rejuvenated. Breathing is rare and very deep. Hands rest on the armrests, fingers at times weakly touching them.

A terrible, unknown energy pours into him. He himself does not know its nature, he is afraid of it, but without this energy he cannot exist for a long time. It started a long time ago, back in Turukhansk exile, when the natives, who had lived for centuries in harmony with the inhumanly harsh nature of the Far North, taught him how to connect to the great energy of Heaven in order to survive today and have the strength to go tomorrow many tens of miles behind countless herds. their deer. And the deer will obey your will. He also needs to survive today, and tomorrow to manage a myriad herd of his subjects, because the energy needed to manage a herd of deer was quite enough to enslave two hundred million people...

At dawn on July 19, 1940, to the accompaniment of prolonged rain, three cars drove out of the gates of the Kuntsevo dacha. Having slipped through the forest by secret access roads, the cortege drove onto a closed strategic highway, designated in the documents under the name "Serpukhovskoye", although it had nothing to do with Serpukhov. After half an hour of driving, the cars turned sharply onto a country road, hidden from prying eyes by the fused crowns of centuries-old trees, passed a huge plywood shield with the inscription "Attention! Restricted area. Fire without warning!" and stopped in front of the barrier. A short hitch - and the barrier opened, letting one car out of three. Two were left to wait on the side of the road. The car, in which Stalin was, drove through two more checkpoints and stopped after a couple of kilometers. The road ended in a thicket of bushes.

Stalin got out of the car, threw his raincoat over his arm and went into the bush, through which there was a barely noticeable path leading to the shore of a quiet forest lake.

In the middle of the lake there was an island, all overgrown with centuries-old trees, through which one could see a two-story old mansion that once belonged to a wealthy merchant. A boat was waiting for Stalin. The boatman, an old man, overgrown to the eyes with a beard, in a long rubberized raincoat with a hood, did not utter a word when he saw Stalin walking towards him. Silently waiting for the leader to settle in the boat, the old man waved the oars and quickly delivered Stalin to the opposite shore. Stalin got out of the boat and began to climb the path winding through the trees towards the mansion.

Everything around was clean and tidy. In even rows of stacks of firewood, chickens busily wandered, cows tied to trees nibbled grass - a forgotten rural idyll of the end of the last century. Stalin went up to the porch. At that moment the door opened and a tall woman in a low-knit shawl and a long linen dress came out to meet him. She was very old, but retained her posture and slim figure. Without saying a word, the woman silently stood aside, letting Stalin into the house. Stalin also did not say anything, did not even honor

her nod.

In the lobby of the first floor there was a table with a telephone, two fire extinguishers hung in the corners,

there was a fire shield with hooks and picks, two clerical chairs - nothing more. The woman remained in the hall. Stalin began to go up to the second floor, where he was met by another woman, dressed like the first, just as slender, majestic, with piercing gray eyes and a faded elderly face.

On a table in front of a large double door was a tray laden with some vials of medicine, and an open book in French.

"How is he?" Stalin asked, handing the woman a cloak and cap. The woman did not answer, her gray eyes tried to meet the eyes of the leader, but he, not expecting any answer, opened the door and carefully closed it behind him. In a large semi-dark room, lit only by the gray light of a rainy morning through heavy curtains, Stalin stopped for a moment and looked around.

A mahogany desk with old-fashioned flourishes took up a good third of the room. The bookcase, even in the semi-darkness, sparkled with golden spines of old books in different languages. Red volumes of Lenin's collected works crowded on a separate shelf. Several paintings in massive gilded frames and many photographs and miniatures hung on the walls were impossible to see in the dark. A heavily curtained door led into an adjoining room. Confidently feeling for the handle behind the curtain, Stalin opened the door. The room, somewhat smaller than the previous one, was lit by an antique chandelier with twelve candles. One of the walls was almost completely covered with icons. Lamps flickered under some.

On a simple iron bed with nickel-plated balls lay an old man with a long, completely white, but well-groomed beard. His eyes were closed. A woman, very similar to the one whom Stalin met in the hall, sat at the head of the old man and read something aloud to him. Seeing Stalin, she closed the book, got up and, without uttering a word, left the room. Stalin took her place. The old man lay with his eyes closed and was silent. Stalin was also silent. Silently he took out his pipe, filled it and lit it.

"We went to the Neman, the Bug and the Prut," the leader said quietly.

"God bless you," the old man whispered without opening his eyes. Stalin, hesitated for a moment, continues:

"We will go further. Let's go to the ocean. The moment is very auspicious."

The old man opens his eyes. With a meek and kind look, he looks at the dictator with some kind of mixed expression of surprise and fear.

"Don't," he says in an unexpectedly firm and resonant voice. - Russia will not be able to live without Europe, destroying Europe, it will perish. Russia and Europe are parts of one organism. There have been many moments in our history when it was possible to take over Europe. Remember the Seven Years' War and the campaign of Alexander the Blessed. But the Lord kept us from temptation. With our low culture and age-old backwardness, we will not be able to dominate the world, even if we capture it with a military hand ... "

Stalin snores irritably, fingering the extinguished pipe. The old man was always politically limited, and so he remained, continuing to rely on the will of God, although he studied the works of Marx and Lenin. However, he did not understand that he, Stalin, was acting not on the basis of some prescriptions of the Lord God, but on the basis of a doctrine that, as Lenin used to say, is invincible because it is true. The old man did not understand that capitalism had entered its last decaying stage, called imperialism, and its own agony would pave the way for proletarian revolutions in all countries of the world. Low culture! Backwardness! It's funny to hear such things when we are armed with the most advanced in the world.

scientific theory and in the shortest possible time they planted the most advanced culture in the world, equally beautiful for both the people's commissar and the collective farmer! Backwardness and low culture - all this was in the time of the old man, and now it is our ideology and culture, our values that can and should dominate the world. And they will dominate, because the world simply has no alternative to such development. And aren't all the events of today a confirmation of the brilliant prophecies of the classic founders of the Great Teaching? And these are not the prophecies of some Grishka Rasputin, but a clear, verified, mathematically calculated up to the fifth digit, strictly scientific prediction, daily, hourly confirmed by life itself. But the old man, of course, cannot be taught this. He lived and lives, or rather lives out in his Orthodox national patriotism, and he will never rise to the heights of proletarian internationalism. Stalin gets up and leaves the room, tightly closing the door... [23]

And throughout the Soviet Union, noisy "spontaneous" rallies of workers are sweeping, welcoming and approving the latest anti-worker decrees, turning them into powerless and faceless slaves. A huge country, squelching through mud and blood, over the bones of its own and other people's subjects, is almost openly entering the warpath.

Speaking at a session of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, Shvernik inspires the trade union delegates: "We must be ready at any moment for the most difficult trials that can only be possible." The hushed hall is trying to figure out where these "heavy trials" will fall on the USSR: from England, Japan or Germany? There seems to be no one left.

Meanwhile, Shvernik continues: "Comrades, Comrade Stalin teaches us that the most dangerous things in the world always happen completely unexpectedly ... Today, the international situation requires us to strengthen the defense capability of our country and the power of our armed forces from day to day!"

Newspapers publish a message from the Wehrmacht High Command about German losses during the blitzkrieg in the West: 27,000 killed, 18 missing, 111,000 wounded. Captured - 1 million 900 thousand enemy soldiers and officers, including five army commanders. Losses, almost three times less than Soviet losses in the war with tiny Finland, unpleasantly cut the ears of Stalin and his inner circle. Even the population, fed on rumors of their own losses, could not but pay attention to this. The hidden hope that Germany would emerge from this war weakened and bled dry crumbled to dust. For the first time, millions of Russians heard surnames, at the mere sound of which hearts contracted in a terrible ominous omen: Guderian, Kleist, Goth, Manstein ...

But the Kremlin felt no omen. On the contrary, at the operational-tactical game held on July 25 in the presence of Stalin, the actions of the German tank groups were recognized as "adventurous". Intelligence did a great job, delivering several cubic meters of operational-tactical orders to various Wehrmacht tank groups for analysts. A total adventure! Please make sure that Marshal Shaposhnikov reports in his usual old-mode manner. The tanks are ahead of the infantry by almost a week's march. They rush forward without secured rear and flanks. In contrast to the First World War, in battle formations there is an exceptionally weak artillery saturation, from the air the group is supported, by our standards, by an incomplete aviation brigade.

The Germans take on a fright! A well-disciplined, non-panic army can easily cope with such completely ill-conceived tactics, cutting off the tanks from the infantry, and the infantry hurrying behind the tanks from the rear. This is the first. And secondly, the German defense was not thought out at all. Guderian drives one cavalry division from flank to flank, which copes with its task in the momentum of a swift offensive. But if the grouping itself is hit, and at the same time its means will be disabled

control and communications, then it will not be difficult to defeat it.

As our calculations show, they will lose a third on crossing by sea and when unloading at the bridgehead, and another third - when breaking through the British defenses. And that's when we start to act. It is important not to miss the moment, and therefore constantly keep the army ready. In addition, calculations carried out by the General Staff show that in order to carry out an operation of such a large scale as Thunderstorm, it is necessary to increase the tank fleet by 40%, the aircraft fleet by 50%, and the strength of the army by a third.

Without uttering a word, Stalin only nodded his head to make it clear that he agreed in principle with the conclusions of the military and let everyone go in peace.

From a self-confident, cunning politician, Stalin gradually begins to turn into a military leader. Just five years later, having become, like Suvorov, the Generalissimo of the Russian army, he would say in a friendly manner to Field Marshal Montgomery: "To hell with politicians. After all, we are military!" But it will be in five years - as long as the geological epoch. In the meantime, he is studying the charter of the Red Army, getting confused in terms and formulations. He never served a day in the army, and the civil war only taught him to be afraid of the military and not to trust them.

Unlike Stalin, Hitler had every reason to consider himself an experienced military man - after all, he spent the entire First World War in the trenches and was wounded, poisoned with gases, and had military awards. No matter what evil tongues say about these awards, they were not given in vain in the Kaiser's army.

He left this war with complete contempt for his bankrupt generals and with a feeling of deep distrust towards them. In his spare time between rallies and party concerns, he carefully studied the works of Clausewitz, Moltke Sr. and the unforgettable Schlieffen, coming to the conclusion that generals only write books, but never read them themselves.

Once again, Hitler thinks out his plan. Of course, he understands that a landing in England, in the current state of the German fleet, is madness. But many people were so carried away by this idea that the reality faded again, covered by the mirage of a swift throw across the English Channel. It's great! Just at that moment, when everyone in the world will be waiting for our landing in England, we will collapse and finally break the neck of this vile Jewish henchman in the Kremlin! The main thing here is to do everything subtly, because it is already clear that he is just waiting for us to start landing in England in order to attack us. But no matter how subtly you act, it will not be possible to deploy approximately 200 divisions on the Russian borders without being noticed.

Had it not been for the English Channel, Hitler would probably have died of anxiety that his overconfident and, most importantly, terribly undisciplined generals would themselves begin an invasion of England and provoke Stalin into action. It will be a crash. If the Bolshevik horde attacks first, it will no longer be stopped, especially since the Wehrmacht, organized for a swift offensive, does not like to defend itself, and really does not know how.

But here you can be calm. The English Channel not only protects England from invasion, it no less protects Hitler from all sorts of surprises and makes it possible to carefully prepare his insidious plan. He calculated everything correctly. Horrified by the upcoming task, Admiral Raeder is forced to follow the order, but follows the Führer literally on his heels and almost crying begs that the Sea Lion operation be postponed, or even better, canceled.

Hitler knows that Raeder will not let you down - he will do everything to disrupt the landing. Thank God, the admiral is experienced and knows how to do it. And Hitler was not wrong. On July 29, the General Staff of the Fleet sent a memorandum to him, imploring him not to carry out the landing this year, but to postpone it to May 1941 or later, i.e. cancel altogether.

On July 31, Hitler again gathers the leadership of the armed forces at his villa in Obersalzberg. Present, as always, are Keitel and Jodl from the headquarters of the high command, Brauchitsch and Halder from the headquarters of the command of the ground forces. Everyone listens attentively to the excited Raeder. Without wasting time on the choice of expressions, the grand admiral directly says that he considers it impossible, with the current balance of naval forces, to transport such a number of troops across the strait. In addition, before the commissioning of the battleships Bismarck and Tirpitz, the operation to divert the English fleet from the waters of the mother country could not be reliably carried out. And both ships, although work on them goes around the clock, cannot be put into operation before the spring of 1941. Further, the British aviation is very active, it is unlikely that the Luftwaffe has gained air supremacy. Throughout July, German aircraft bombed British ships in the strait and the southern ports of Great Britain. Goering promised to destroy enemy fighter aircraft during July, drawing them into battles over the English Channel. What is the result gentlemen? According to unverified reports, the Luftwaffe sank only four British destroyers and 18 coasters, while losing 296 aircraft destroyed and 136 damaged. The British also announced that they had lost 148 fighters. But in any case, the commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine continues, even if all the above conditions did not exist, the fleet is not able to complete preparations before September 15th.

We are talking only about the concentration of landing craft, and then on the condition that there are no unforeseen circumstances due to enemy actions or because of the weather. (The weather is the best friend of the admirals of the whole world, behind which they reliably hide from what they do not want to do.)

Yes, yes, the weather, Hitler brightened up, remembering what torments he had taken on board the Deutschland on the way to Klaipeda. He asks Raeder to explain to the gentlemen what he means by speaking of unexpected circumstances caused by the weather.

The admiral instantly feels the support of the Fuhrer and willingly translates his report into a lecture on the weather. Starting from the second week of October, he explains, the weather in the North Sea and the strait is usually very bad. Light fogs, starting in early October, gradually become dense and thick.

Well, wonderful, puts in a remark Halder, this will allow you to covertly transfer the army across the English Channel. English aviation and navy simply won't detect us. Yes, Raeder agrees, but we also have a chance not to find landing sites and destroy the landing on the coastal cliffs. If a storm breaks out, the barges will simply sink. Even large transports will be helpless, since no one and nothing can be unloaded ashore. Not sparing black colors and becoming more and more gloomy, the admiral paints to the representatives of the main command what awaits them if, even without respecting the enemy, they cease to respect the weather.

The admiral then touches on his main differences with the army. The Army wants to land on a broad front from the Straits of Dover to Limey Bay, but the Navy is unable to provide the necessary tonnage for a landing on such a broad front, not to mention the expected reaction of the fleet and enemy aircraft. The admiral insists that the landing front be shortened, extending from the Strait of Dover only to Eastbourne.

"All things considered," the admiral concludes, "I believe that the best time for the operation may be May 1941."

But the British army, which is currently in very bad shape, will get 8-10 months of respite, which will give it the opportunity to form another 30-35 divisions and

concentrate them in the places of the proposed landing of our troops.

The operation to "disperse" the British fleet has already begun and will continue. Auxiliary raiders went out into the ocean, after the repair is completed, warships will also go there. The Russians kindly offered to escort our raiders to the Pacific Ocean using their Northern Sea Route. Promises to sharply increase the activity of the Italian fleet. He has problems with fuel and repairs, but they will all be resolved in the near future. A plan for a distraction strike in Africa has been developed. But we will achieve a decisive result only by capturing the British metropolis. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare for the landing by September 15th. The final decision - whether to carry out the operation on September 15 or postpone it to May 1941 - will be made after the Luftwaffe has carried out a decisive offensive against England, which will begin in the very near future.

"FUHRER HEADQUARTERS

August 1, 1940

TOP SECRET

Directive No. 17

ON AIR AND SEA WAR AGAINST ENGLAND

To create the conditions necessary for the final crushing of England, I order:

1. German air force to suppress the British air force with all means at their disposal and as quickly as possible.
2. The Luftwaffe is the vanguard of Operation Sea Lion...
6. An intense air war is to be started on August 6 or immediately after that date...

Adolf Hitler".

The directive signed by Keitel read:

"TOP SECRET

OPERATION SEA LION

The Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Forces reported on July 31 that the necessary

Preparations for Sea Lion cannot be completed until September 15th. Based on this, the Fuhrer ordered:

The Army and Air Force must continue to prepare for the operation "Sea Lion" and complete it by September 15 ...

Despite warnings from the Navy that they can only guarantee landing cover on a narrow stretch of coast (as far as Eastbourne), preparations must be made for an invasion on a broad front, as originally planned ... "

While the High Command of the Wehrmacht launched an unprecedented campaign to mislead Stalin, on August 1, Stalin himself, bored, sat in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, listening to another boring speech by Molotov, who instructed the deputies in understanding aspects of the country's foreign policy. In his dull, methodical voice, the head of government was saying:

"Germany has achieved great success in the war against the Western Allies. However, she did not solve the fundamental problem - how to end the war on the terms she desired. July 19

The Reich Chancellor invited Great Britain to start peace negotiations, but the British government rejected his proposal, considering it as a demand for surrender. It seems that a new phase of the war is beginning - a struggle between Germany and Italy on the one hand and Great Britain, supported by the United States, on the other.

Molotov, in principle, does not hide his joy at the fact that England does not stop fighting, and his reference to the United States makes the deputies understand that Germany does not have much chance of winning this war and that this fact does not upset the Soviet government in the least. But everything is presented carefully, in "Newspeak", which is not so easily unambiguously deciphered.

Describing the current Soviet-German relations, Molotov does not say anything new, but repeats word for word the well-known TASS statement of June 23:

"Recently there have been many speculations in the British and pro-British press about the possibility of worsening relations between the Soviet Union and Germany. Attempts were made to frighten us with the growing power of Germany. But our relations are based not on temporary opportunistic considerations, but on the fundamental state interests of our two countries."

Molotov also touches on relations with England. Here you have to be very careful. Firstly, not to frighten off the Germans, but also not to anger the British very much, who, in the event of the beginning of the Thunderstorm, at least temporarily, will turn into allies. Molotov, however, emphasizes that "after all the hostile acts that England has committed against us, one can hardly expect any favorable development of Anglo-Soviet relations." Having said this in a quick patter, Molotov hurries to get away from the topic of Anglo-Soviet relations, which in reality are much more complex than they can be expressed in Newspeak. The Anglo-Soviet trade agreement was renewed, the British even agreed to transfer part of the gold reserves of the former Baltic republics to the USSR. They are clearly waiting for some kind of drastic change in the course of the foreign policy of the USSR. Has the ubiquitous intelligence service about the impending Thunderstorm sniffed out? The British will do everything possible to spoil the Soviet-German relations, set Hitler against the USSR. Then what Stalin had envisioned would happen: a long, bloody and exhausting war that would so weaken and bleed both countries that it would enable England, having sat out on its own.

islands, dictate the terms of future peace and maintain a dominant position in Europe. But it will not work, good gentlemen! We, too, are not born with a bast. Let Hitler invade your islands, and this is where we will intervene and take you all with our bare hands, as they did Baltic, Bessarabia and Bukovina.

Molotov is just passing on to the recent events in these countries. Everyone already knows the Soviet method of public coverage of such events, and no one is surprised. Everyone knows that the Soviet Union simply took back the territories that belonged to Russia.

As for Northern Bukovina and the large city of Chernivtsi, here the Soviet Union went to meet the will of the population, consisting mainly of Ukrainians and Moldovans, who with great "joy and exultation" decided to join the USSR, as their brothers in Bessarabia did.

Even without much imagination, one could imagine how the Soviet Union would swallow one country after another: the Moldavians in Bessarabia would want to reunite with their brothers in Romania, the Romanian Turks with their brothers in Turkey, the Romanian Magyars with their brothers in Hungary and Italy and so on. The main thing is that there is a good technique!

As for the Baltic states, Molotov explains its entry into the USSR as follows: in July, free parliamentary elections took place in all three countries, and we can now note with satisfaction that the peoples of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, in a friendly outburst, elected representatives who unanimously announced the introduction of Soviet power in all three countries and the entry of these countries into the USSR.

Molotov ends his speech according to the standard pattern that all great and small leaders of the Soviet Union were required to end any speeches, urging the Soviet people to be in constant mobilization readiness. After all, it is not a secret for him that, talking with a Latin American diplomat, Hitler admitted that on August 16 he had a banquet at Buckingham Palace. And already at the end of August 1. You have to be ready for everything.

On August 3 (again surprisingly quickly) Hitler's directive No. 17 lay down in Russian translation on Stalin's desk. Many other data coming from various sources confirmed the intention of the Germans to launch an offensive against England. And only a short message, intercepted from the British station in Brussels, spoke of the transfer of German troops to the territory of the General Government and the Protectorate, where the total number of combined arms and tank divisions had already been brought to 36. What a miracle, 36 divisions!

The British report 36. They really want us to stay awake at night because of these German divisions and the reports they throw at us. No, let them themselves stay awake at night, because on September 15 they will be invaded. And we need to prepare for this period, but in a new way. Thinking over the situation, Stalin came to the conclusion that it would be nice to shift the center of gravity of the Thunderstorm from the northern and central directions to the south, i.e. deliver the main blow to the Balkans.

He informed Shaposhnikov, Timoshenko and Meretskov about this, which puzzled them greatly. Shaposhnikov's old plan, which was available in one copy, provided for the execution of Operation Thunderstorm to concentrate approximately 180 divisions and 172 air regiments on the western border. These forces were supposed to strike the main blow in the Warsaw area with access to the Vistula in its lower reaches, while crushing the enemy troops in East Prussia with the northern flank. The left wing of the front, inflicting an auxiliary blow on Ivangorod, smashes the Lublin grouping of the enemy and goes to the Vistula in its middle

flow. Further, capturing Denmark on the right flank, all fronts cross the Oder on the move, developing an offensive against Berlin. At this stage, diplomacy ensures the consolidation of allied relations with England, at least until the Red Army enters the English Channel.

The plan was carefully drawn up with a detailed description of the direction of strikes, areas of concentration, the number of troops, their tasks, as well as the tasks of the fleet, aviation, engineering troops and even captured teams and special teams of the NKVD, special teams for combing territories, for the rapid "movement" of hostile elements among the local population in the eastern regions of the USSR and others, already perfectly worked out in Poland, the Baltic states and Bessarabia. For the sake of this plan, the Bialystok and Lvov balconies were drawn.

After the surrender of France, it became clear that the plan was outdated, since, for all its merits, it provided for the conduct of military operations only against Germany. Now, when a defenseless and torn Europe lay before the USSR, Stalin, having gained knowledge in the field of strategy and operational art in the quiet of his office, decided to change the plan.

The main task after the German invasion of England will be the capture of the Balkans, i.e. occupation of Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the northern regions of Greece and the Turkish straits. At the same time, on a broad front, the Red Army enters the southern borders of Germany and invades this country both from the south - through the territory of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and from the east, according to the original plan, using "balconies" for swiftness.

What will Germany's initial reaction be to our invasion of the Balkans? There may be several options here. Since the main forces of the German armed forces, including the overwhelming majority of aviation and navy, will be engaged in battles on the territory of England, and there is reason to believe that these battles will be very cruel and bloody, Hitler is unlikely to dare to react quickly and sharply in the Balkans themselves, which it is necessary to pass quickly and efficiently, without giving anyone time to come to their senses, sweeping away any resistance. The prerequisites for this have been created: the Red Army has an advantage over all potential opponents in the Balkans by about 10 to 1. In addition, we expect that as the Red Army advances in many countries, in particular, in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece, there will be social revolutions, and the peoples of these countries will themselves ask for our help against Hitler.

Thus, directly in the Balkans, Hitler will not be able to oppose anything real to us, and we will see if we should contact him. According to the situation. But! The leader raised his finger: Hitler can react, and I think that he will do so - on our western borders, if we ourselves do not go on the offensive from the "balconies" before that, as Boris Mikhailovich and Comrade Meretskov suggest. Then we go over to the offensive according to the old plan. But the main thing now is the Southwestern Front and the Kiev Special Military District. In order to help Comrade Zhukov, it is necessary to send representatives of the People's Commissariat of Defense there and bring the district to a state of the highest combat readiness by September-October.

The Germans have already begun a large-scale operation to "pulverize" the British fleet. General Golikov read out a report: one by one, German auxiliary cruisers, disguised as merchant ships, slipped into the ocean communications, raising the flags of neutral countries. Knowing that Stalin does not like general, faceless phrases, the head of intelligence gives details: on March 11, raider No. 16 "Atlantis" went out into the ocean and, according to our information, is successfully operating; Raider No. 36 Orion followed on 7 April. Then they still had orders to pull as many forces of the English fleet as possible away from Norway. In May and June, the second line of auxiliary cruisers broke into the ocean: raider No. 21 "Vidder", raider No. 23 "Penguin", raider No. 10 "Thor". According to the initial estimate, these raiders have already drowned at least 300 thousand tons of the English merchant fleet,

which forces the British to keep large cruising formations away from the mother country.

It should be noted that auxiliary cruisers in the fight against English trade turned out to be much more effective than large warships, whose exit to the sea is difficult to hide, which are more easily detected, and, taking into account the general balance of forces at sea, are easily neutralized. Thus, the battlecruiser Gneisenau, operating in the Iceland area, was torpedoed by a British submarine on June 26 and out of action for a long time. In this regard, Golikov dares to remind Stalin that the German auxiliary raider No. 45 "Komet" has been anchored off the island of Kolguev for about a month and is waiting to be escorted by the Northern Sea Route to the Pacific Ocean - to the deep rear of the English maritime trade, where he will make like a fox in a chicken coop.

The leader thinks. Let's wait a bit to see how things go. Northern affairs are sitting in the liver of the leader. Despite all the measures of secrecy, British intelligence got wind of the "Basis Nord". English ships are increasingly appearing in the Barents Sea. The British press is making noise day after day that the USSR is not a neutral country, but "actually at war", threatening to take measures.

These measures are understandable: Baku, Grozny and Guryev are our precious and, alas, so far the only sources of oil. True, already at a distance of an outstretched paw lies the Ploeshta basin, but still it is not yet ours.

By the way, the leader is interested, the Germans are very fond of when we help them even to the detriment of ourselves. And how do they fulfill our requests, say, for a British air base in the Baghdad area? Is there any progress there? Yes, there is. The Germans promise in the near future to intensify the supply of weapons to Rashid Ali and help him with advisers-instructors. It is beneficial for the Germans themselves to destroy the air base in Mosul. Apparently, by the spring of next year, this issue will be finally resolved.

Stalin is silent. He knows more than Golikov. Through the service of the NKVD, the Middle East residency has long established contact with Rashid Ali Gaidani, who hates the Germans no less than the British. Penetrating into Iraq would bring Hitler closer to the oil sources of both Iraq itself and Iran. This cannot be allowed. Beria's people are already working in Turkey to deliver weapons to Iraqi nationalists through its territory.

Left alone, Stalin thoughtfully approaches the bookcase. With an automatic movement, he takes out the 42nd volume of Lenin's works, opens it on the bookmark and once again enjoys the unearthly wisdom of the great teacher. Until "until we have conquered the whole world," the leader of the world proletariat admonishes from oblivion, it is necessary to "use all possible contradictions and opposites between the imperialists" in order to bring the moment of a new imperialist clash as close as possible ...

"If we are forced to endure such scoundrels as capitalist thieves, each of whom sharpens a knife against us, it is our direct duty to turn these knives against each other ..."

He, Stalin, fulfilled the prophecy of a genius. Knives are moved against each other. Germany and England will soon destroy each other. Now we are helping Germany, but soon we will become allies of England, having replaced German troops on the coast of the English Channel, and then with all the might of our army and navy we will fall upon the last stronghold of world imperialism - Great Britain ...

On August 5, following the Fuhrer's oral instructions given back in June and confirmed orally at a meeting in the Berghof on July 31, the Chief of Staff of the 18th Army, General Marx, who was considered

a specialist in Russia, presented the first version of the Operational Project "Ost" - a war plan against the USSR. The discussion of the plan was attended by Halder, Toppelskirch, and the German military attaché in Moscow, General Kestring, who was on vacation in Berlin. General Marx based his plan on the experience of the war with Poland. Based on the experience of this war and an assessment of the terrain and the outline of the road network in the Soviet Union, he proposed the creation of two strike groups aimed at Moscow and Kiev. By this, Marx reflected the opinion of the General Staff, who believed that Moscow - the center of the Soviet Union - played a much greater role than the capitals of other countries. The General Staff had no doubt that Stalin would deploy the main forces of the Red Army in the direction of Moscow. Formulating the idea of his plan, Marx pointed out that the goal of the upcoming war was the need to "smash the Russian armed forces and make Russia unable to act as an enemy of Germany in the near future. To ensure the protection of the Reich from Soviet air strikes, Russia must be occupied up to the line: the lower Don-Middle Volga-Northern Dvina.

Halder approved Marx's version. The General Staff officers knew that in the OKW, under the leadership of Jodl, they were developing their own version of the plan, known as the Lossberg Etude, after the name of the developer, lieutenant colonel.

The OKW plan, in contrast to the Marx plan, provided for the creation of not two, but three shock groups and close cooperation with the Finns during the attack on Leningrad, the capture of which was given special importance. Having developed their plans, military professionals waited for the decision of Hitler, who seemed to be completely absorbed in the upcoming attack on England.

Hitler, indeed, was looking forward to the start of the air offensive, falling, as had happened more than once, under the spell of the irresponsible assurances of his friend Goering.

Within the vast plan to mislead Stalin, there were goals of their own: England, unable to withstand the blows of the Luftwaffe, would ask for peace and get it, but on much worse terms than he offers today. In addition, there is specific information about the possibility of an uprising in Scotland. German intelligence established contact with influential Scottish aristocrats, who were extremely unhappy that the native German peoples were being pitted by Jews in a fratricidal war. There is also the Irish Republican Army, besieging the German secret services with their breathtaking projects: to kill the king, to kidnap Churchill, to blow up all the warships of the Royal Navy one by one. Heydrich and Canaris believe that it is better not to get involved with the IRA - it is carefully filtered by British intelligence. The Scots are another matter, says Canaris, who heads the military intelligence of the Reich and has long been working for the British. He knows very well that the whole Scottish story was invented by the British in order to provoke the Germans to any ill-conceived actions in the general, global plan of supplying them with disinformation.

Information coming from the southern regions of England inspires optimism. Panic. There is no army in the modern sense of the word. Poorly trained and even worse armed militias. The roads to the north are clogged with refugees. The royal family and government are ready to flee to Canada. All sources of information seem to be inviting the Germans to immediately invade. But there is an English fleet in the strait, and so far it has not been possible to remove it from there by the manpower of the German fleet. There is still hope for the Italians, but it is fading every day.

On the day Italy declared war, the Mediterranean squadron of the British entered the Adriatic, brazenly challenging the Italians to battle. The Italians sat quieter than mice in their bases, afraid to poke their noses out. In July, by the terrible orders of the Duce himself, Italian ships were pushed into the sea several times, but at the mere sight of the British, they turned back.

The Duce personally assured Hitler that his fleet would sweep the British out of the Mediterranean, showing newsreels specially brought with him, filmed at various bases of the Apennine Peninsula. The spectacle is really impressive: beautiful battleships, decorated with flags of coloring - "Roma", "Litorio", "Vittorio Veneto", "Giulio Cesare", "Cavour", confirming the high class and reputation of Italian shipbuilders - slender barrels of fifteen-inch guns, swift contours, low, indistinguishable silhouettes. What are the English Mediterranean ships against them - the old women of the times of Jutland? But the formidable reputation of the "ruler of the seas", whose fleet has had no rivals for more than a hundred years, presses, presses.

Here you can understand the Italians - we swim ourselves, pressing our heads into our shoulders. We need a victory, even a small one, but a victory in a battle between surface ships. Psychologically, she could solve a lot. Let's wait for the commissioning of Bismarck and Tirpitz. The Italians are also asking to wait until the Roma and Impero are in service, but this is not expected before 1942. No no no. Wait until 42? This is impossible. Hitler looks reproachfully at his friend. Mussolini shudders under the gaze of the Fuhrer.

The Duce got into the war in full confidence that everything would be over by September, and he would have every right to be present at peace negotiations, participating in the post-war division of Europe and the world. Italy was generally not ready even for a short war, and, apparently, there is no end in sight to it. Duce doesn't know yet

all plans for the destruction of England are needed by the Fuhrer, mainly so that Moscow believes in the authenticity of the plans for Operation Sea Lion. The Italians must intensify military operations at sea and on land.

More than 300 thousand Italian troops are concentrated in Libya under the command of Marshal Griziani. They are opposed by about 60,000 British gathered in Egypt. The Italians must drive the British out of Egypt, capture their large base in Alexandria and cut the Suez Canal. If the Italians do this, England is screwed. In addition, a direct road through the Middle East to Iran and India is being opened. Forward, descendants of the proud Romans! The Duce promises the Fuhrer that by September 15 - the date of the invasion of England - the Italian armed forces will have completed all the tasks assigned to them. Hitler shakes Mussolini's hand with feeling.

Mussolini leaves with tears in his eyes, but with some resentment. The ill-concealed contempt and indulgence on the part of Hitler and haughty German field marshals makes him want to prove otherwise: that the traditions of the great Rome are still alive in Italy, that Italy is a sword in the hand of God, that the new Italian army, educated on the great ideas of fascism, is not smelly rabble of the first world war.

During that war, they often said: "Why did the Lord God create the Italian army? So that there was someone to defeat the Austro-Hungarian army!"

In those years, Mussolini, a young correspondent for several socialist newspapers, often traveled to Zurich, where, playing chess with Lenin, he picked up the great ideas of a party state ...

Hitler is extremely displeased. There was no flash of another hysteria, but he looked sullenly at his old friend Goering. On August 7, a lone British bomber dropped bombs on the La Bourget airport near Paris, now occupied by a Luftwaffe formation. By the way, it's already August 8th! Why doesn't the Luftwaffe start the operation?

"The regrouping of forces, my Fuhrer, took a little longer than we planned. But I am happy to report to you that almost everything is ready. Three air fleets will take part in the operation. 2nd Air Fleet under the command of Field Marshal Kesselring

deployed at airfields in Holland, Belgium and northern France. The 3rd Air Fleet under the command of Field Marshal Sperrle is deployed at the airfields of Northern France. The 5th air fleet under the command of General Stumpf is deployed at the airfields of Norway and Dahlia. Kesselring and Sperrle together have 929 fighters, 875 horizontal and 316 dive bombers. Stumpf has 123 bombers and 34 Me-110 twin-engine fighters.

According to our estimates, the British have no more than 800 fighters in service. They will be crushed and destroyed within two weeks, my Fuhrer!

Goering does not yet know that Hitler is not going to land in England. But Hitler himself cannot yet say anything definite. It is possible that Douai's theory will be confirmed and England, unable to withstand the German bombing, capitulates. Then he will order the entire English fleet to assemble at Scapa Flow and sink there.

"But when, Goering, do you think to start?"

- No later than August 12, my Fuhrer.

- Good good. I wish you all the best, Herman.

"Heil Hitler!"

But Hitler thinks otherwise. Intelligence reports with alarm about the concentration of Soviet troops on the borders of Romania and Bulgaria, about the activity of Soviet diplomats in Sofia and Budapest, about the actions of the Soviet intelligence network in Belgrade and Athens, about the frequent appearances of Soviet warships near the Bosphorus. This is literally information of the last days. Stalin unexpectedly shifted the center of gravity of his armed forces to the south, and it is quite obvious what he is going to do.

The Soviet press is full of reports about the "heinous provocations of the Romanian military" on the Soviet border. The same thing happened before the invasion of Poland, Finland and even the Baltic states. Stalin is preparing to at least grab another piece of Romania. This time with the Ploiesti Oil Basin, the only source of crude oil that Germany can count on, apart from, of course, huge supplies from the USSR. But Stalin can stop these deliveries at any moment. If Romanian oil is seized by Stalin, the entire German war machine is in danger of becoming a pile of dead iron.

This issue requires an immediate solution - in no case should Stalin be given the opportunity to make the first move, and since he moved south, it is necessary to expand the front of the future strike against him, i.e. deploy troops in Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. Maybe even in Turkey.

German intelligence in England recently obtained interesting information from a source close to the Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky. The essence of this information is as follows:

"Stalin will not begin active operations until the landing of the Wehrmacht in England."

In other words, he is waiting for our invasion of England to stab us in the back. If this is not another "disinformation" of the British, who are thus trying to disrupt our plans to invade their island, then we can feel more confident. Only constantly let Stalin know that our plans for the invasion of England are final and that nothing in the world can stop us. Even the English fleet...

In the Kiev Special Military District of General of the Army Zhukov, summer maneuvers are underway, as close as possible to a combat situation. Bombers and fighters are concentrated at border airfields. One district of Zhukov has more of them than all three German air fleets allocated by Goering for an air offensive against England. Artillery roars day and night at the ranges advanced to the border, practicing all types of combat shooting. Tanks are gathering dust along the roads of the acquired Bessarabia and Bukovina. They are rapidly moving towards a new frontier, and no one knows if they will stop or not. The newly arrived rifle divisions are being retrained into mountain rifle divisions in a feverish rush. There are many mountains ahead from the Carpathians to the Alps. The formidable silhouette of the battleship Paris Commune, surrounded by bristling cruisers and destroyers, looms near Romanian territorial waters. The highways from Constanta to the north are filled with refugees.

Stalin, waiting for the landing of German troops in England, shifted the center of gravity of the Thunderstorm to the south, guided by several considerations at once.

Firstly, the strike through Romania and Bulgaria made it possible not to immediately enter into direct confrontation with the German troops, while at the same time carrying out their deep coverage, which made the German counterattack in the regions of Lvov and Bialystok unpromising. Secondly, the capture of the Ploiesti oil put the Germans in such a difficult position that even theoretically it was not seen how Hitler could get out of this situation, having his best troops stuck in bloody battles on the bridgeheads of southern England. Even if he had found such a way, the offensive of the Soviet troops in huge pincers through central Poland from the east and through Austria from the south - provided that the blockade of Germany by the British fleet continued - would somehow lead to the collapse of the Reich. And thirdly, if we take into account the inevitability of proletarian revolutions in many, even if not all, countries, then this would lead to a long-term and lasting hegemony of the USSR and communist ideology in Europe, and taking into account the subsequent rapid collapse of the British Empire - in all over the world.

Stalin carefully weighed his every step, planned and calculated up to the third sign. Lenin calculated something for him, who, in fairness, I must say, was much more adventurous than his student. Especially in terms of proletarian revolutions.

The slogan "Stalin is Lenin today" was not at all, as many believe, mere verbiage, but rather a legal document securing hereditary rights ...

Hitler at first clearly underestimated his Moscow accomplice in robbery. Blinded by a thirst for revenge for the Compiègne Forest and Scapa Flow, ready to do anything to untie his hands in the West, he recklessly recognized southeastern Europe as the sphere of interests of the USSR, forgetting in a fever about the precious Romanian oil and not seeing what Stalin clearly saw. And Stalin saw an excellent opportunity for the partition of Romania, which, in terms of beauty of execution, was to surpass the recent partition of Poland.

The fact is that Romania, so to speak, had the misfortune to be among the victorious countries of the First World War and, as such, acquired the vast lands of its neighbors who lost this ill-fated war. Hungary, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, paid for the sins of the collapsed elderly monarchy by giving Transylvania to the victorious Romanians. Bulgaria, which, betraying all the ideas of Pan-Slavism, fought against Russia on the side of Germany, gave up its province of Dobruja. The incredible ease with which Stalin took Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from the Romanians, using only threats and ultimatums, tempted other neighbors of Romania, who made such territorial claims to Bucharest that if they were fulfilled, only a memory would remain of Romania, as of what something Urartu.

The Hungarians were promised so much in secret negotiations that they, moved to tears, even

released from prison and sent to Moscow sentenced to life imprisonment of the bloody henchman of Bela Kun, the Comintern agent Matthias Rakosi. It was very useful to Stalin, because after the division of Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, no way out of the Stalinist mousetrap was foreseen. For Bulgaria, Stalin had Dimitrov, but for Hungary, after Stalin shot Bela Kun, there was no one. So Rakosi was very useful to him.

The enormous work carried out in Greece and Yugoslavia was somewhat hampered by the intrigues of British intelligence, whose agents the Balkans were packed with. But Hungary has long-standing territorial claims to Yugoslavia, and the Bulgarians to the Greeks, who occupied Bulgarian Thrace.

Recruited by Soviet intelligence on the ideas of Slavic solidarity, the commander of the Yugoslav Air Force, General Simovich, gradually prepared a pro-Soviet coup d'état, and although there was evidence that Simovich had been recruited by the British and, it seems, even by the Americans, few people in Moscow were worried. When the Soviet troops enter Belgrade, then we'll figure it out. In Moscow, for a year now, Joseph Tito, whom the leader had predicted to be the Yugoslav leaders, was idle.

So, the skillful intrigues of Soviet intelligence, as purposeful as in the troubled years of the Balkan wars, when Russia, inciting Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece against Turkey, eventually achieved that Greece, in alliance with Serbia, defeated Bulgaria, again prepared the Balkans for the situation when all the countries of the region were ready to cling to each other, preparing the environment for proletarian revolutions and the liberation campaigns of the Red Army.

Hitler's biggest flaw was his completely uncontrollable ability to wishful thinking. Despite all the lessons of the past and present, he continued to believe that his faithful ally Mussolini could fulfill the tasks that Hitler had entrusted to him. Among these tasks, in addition to neutralizing the British fleet in the Mediterranean, was the task of monitoring the situation in the Balkans.

As early as December 1939, the Fascist Grand Council of Italy declared: "Everything that pertains to the Danube basin in the Balkans is of direct interest to Italy."

Mussolini's son-in-law, Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano, publicly promised military assistance to Romania, pompously calling it "a guardrail against the Soviet Union." However, as usual, Italy was unable to do anything. The road to the Balkans was blocked by Greece and Yugoslavia, which, without any enthusiasm, watched the fluffy Duce. Hitler again had to do everything himself. For a start, he managed to seat the Romanians at the negotiating table with the Hungarians and Bulgarians, although it was obvious that these negotiations would lead nowhere. But it was necessary to buy time, at least a couple of weeks, to bring the troops closer, and this was not so easy in the web of false transfers and activities carried out as part of the upcoming show - the attack on England - played out for Stalin ...

On August 12, Goering gave the order to launch Operation Eagle. On this day, twelve British radar stations were hit. The presence of British radar came as a complete surprise to the Germans. Hitler, although he quoted Nietzsche at every opportunity, remained at heart a strange cross between a Hegelian and a Marxist, sincerely considering everything connected with electronics and nuclear physics to be "Jewish things." Poorly understanding the importance of radars in the air defense system, the Germans nevertheless decided to bomb them. bombed somehow.

lazily: they destroyed one station, damaged five and decided that it was enough to waste ammunition on all sorts of trifles.

On August 13 and 14, more than 1,500 Luftwaffe aircraft attacked British fighter bases. Although the German victory reports gleefully announced that five enemy airfields were completely destroyed, in reality the damage done was negligible. The British lost only 13 aircraft, the damage to Germany was more significant - 47 aircraft.

Moscow was enthusiastic about the beginning of the offensive against England.

A cipher message flew to the Kiev and Odessa districts with an order to complete preparations "for major troop movements" no later than September 15.

There was little time left, and problems piled up one on top of the other.

A month ago, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR "On liability for the production of low-quality or incomplete products and for non-compliance with mandatory standards by industrial enterprises" was issued. The two-point decree was formulated so simply and clearly that it was completely incomprehensible why it did not produce any results. Marriage continued to mangle military equipment.

Stalin demanded the Decree to himself and once again carefully read it:

"1. Establish that the release of low-quality or incomplete industrial products and the release of products in violation of mandatory standards is an anti-state crime, tantamount to sabotage.

2. For the release of low-quality and incomplete products and for the release of products in violation of mandatory standards - directors, chief engineers and heads of technical control departments should be brought to trial and, by a court sentence, subjected to imprisonment for a term of 5 to 8 years.

Reading the decree, Stalin realized his mistake. Dipping his pen into the inkwell, he crossed out the last digits with a sharp movement and wrote "from 10 to 15 years" at the top.

On August 15, the Germans took to the air the available forces of all three air fleets: 801 bombers and 1149 fighters. The 5th Air Fleet, operating from Scandinavian airfields, sent about 150 aircraft into battle, for some reason believing that the northeast of England would be defenseless. To the great surprise of the Germans, at least seven squadrons of British fighters rushed to intercept them. Thirty German bombers were shot down in a matter of minutes of battle. The rest turned back, failing to shoot down a single Englishman. On this, the fighting of the 5th fleet in the sky of England are over.

In the south, German pilots were more successful, breaking through the British air defense system almost to London. Four aircraft factories in Krydon were destroyed by bombs, five airfields were put out of action. But all this came at a cost. The Germans lost 75 aircraft, the British - 34. It was clear that if the Luftwaffe continued to lose aircraft in this proportion, then they were unlikely to succeed in the allotted two or three weeks

"sweep" British aircraft from the sky over the British Isles.

On August 17, the Germans lost 71 aircraft, the British lost 27. The Ju-87 and Stuka dive bombers, which brilliantly paved the way for tanks in Poland and France, here, in the sky of England, turned out to be decoy ducks, easy prey for British fighters. Goering had no choice but to withdraw these low-speed bombers from the battle, which reduced the strength of the German bomber aviation by about a third. Victorious fanfares sounded on all German radio waves: "Broken England is bleeding with the last drops of blood." Another blow, and - the invasion.

Moscow closely followed all these events. According to Stalin, the time has come to fulfill the obligations assumed to "spray" the British fleet before the invasion. Never forgetting anything, Stalin remembered that the German cruiser Komet had been stationed near Kolguev Island for a month, which he promised to lead by the Northern Sea Route to the Pacific Ocean.

He understood the responsibility and risk that he was taking on by piloting a Nazi warship along the entire Siberian coast on the eve of the inevitable clash with Germany for hegemony in Europe, and hesitated, waiting for further developments.

While Stalin hesitated, the crew of the Comet, changing their parking place every day, trained hard, increasing their combat training. Finally, under the impression of a brilliant, in his opinion, the beginning of the air blitz over England, Stalin decided to once again demonstrate his friendship to Hitler - just do not refuse the invasion! - and ordered to start wiring the cruiser.

On August 18, according to the order received from Papanin, the Komet weighed anchor and headed for Matochkin Shar, where the Lenin icebreaker was waiting for it. The historic voyage of the auxiliary cruiser Komet has begun! [24]

Chapter 6

On August 19, taking advantage of a respite during the fighting due to bad weather, Goering, at his residence in Carinhall, convened a meeting of the air fleet commanders and their chiefs of staff and ordered the resumption of Operation Eagle when the weather improved, concentrating all efforts against enemy aircraft. "We have reached a decisive period in the air war against England," declared the Reich Marshal. - The most important task is to defeat enemy aircraft. The main goal is the destruction of British fighters. The most experienced pilot himself, an ace of the First World War, even then declared a war criminal, Goering was right. The British fighter aircraft were fading away, and the selfless valor and combat skill of the British pilots could not compensate for their small numbers. It seemed that one more effort - and air supremacy over England would be won. Everyone was looking forward to better weather...

Hitler looked with growing anxiety at the Balkans, especially at Romania. The policy of King Carol II irritated the Fuhrer. In particular, Romania, as if nothing had happened, continued to supply its oil to the British in the Middle East, transporting it from its Black Sea ports through the Aegean Sea. At the same time, the British, with their characteristic arrogance and impudence, roughly used the Greek territorial waters, which Greece did not seem to see. But as soon as the Italian ships entered the Aegean Sea to intercept British oil convoys, Greece made such a fuss about the violation of its sovereignty that it seemed that Athens and Rome were about to cling to each other.

throat When the connection of the Italian fleet had already intercepted the English tankers carrying precious oil to Alexandria, the English cruiser Sydney jumped out of the Greek territorial waters with a division of destroyers and in the ensuing short battle sank the Italian cruiser and two destroyers, heavily damaged the second cruiser and one destroyer.

Romania did not seem to understand how indecently she was behaving and what she was risking. On the one hand, she calls on the Germans for help against the advancing Stalinist hordes, and on the other hand, she sells oil to the British, the mortal enemies of the Fuhrer, And as if all this was not enough, the Hungarian-Romanian conflict over Transylvania was ready to flare up at any moment, which the Hungarians demanded for themselves in full, although it never completely belonged to them.

And Stalin was already happily rubbing his hands. There is no need for any intelligence reports - it was enough to read Soviet newspapers, which in unison call for "fraternal" assistance to "fraternal" peoples, although it is not clear whether these "fraternal" peoples are blood brothers or brothers in class. The transfer of German troops to the east, in case of any surprises, was extremely slow. Hitler harassed Brauchitsch and Halder with phone calls and endless reminders, constantly being, according to Dr. Morrel, in a gloomy state ...

Stalin, on the contrary, was in an excellent mood. No one understands what the matter is, but the leader allows himself jokes that are completely uncharacteristic of him, plunging the environment into awe. A report in the Soviet newspapers, shedding light on such a good mood of the leader, will appear only on August 24, but Stalin already knows that in distant Mexico City, the NKVD agents finally succeeded after several unsuccessful attempts to eliminate (with an ice pick on the head) Stalin's most hated enemy, the most vile of all Jews surrounding Lenin - Leon Trotsky. Everything, of course, was done vile, dirty, unprofessional. The killer, Spanish Communist Comintern agent Ramon Mercader, was arrested by the Mexican police. In this he was very lucky, because if he returned to Moscow, he would have to be liquidated so as not to blurt out too much. But in prison, he will keep quiet, because. knows that we will make barbecue out of his mother. In the meantime, in order to keep silent better, we will award him the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

It somehow became easier in my soul that Trotsky was gone. Breathe better, work better. What do we have there? Yes, the anniversary of the pact of August 23, 1939. Looking back, we can say that thanks to him, a lot was accomplished in a year. And how much more can be done! General Zhukov reports that the units entrusted to him are not yet quite ready for a throw to the Balkans, but with each day of continuous exercises their combat skill is growing and will reach the peak of readiness by mid-September. The new chief of the general staff, General Meretskov, is thinking over a new mobilization plan. How to carry it out so that the Germans do not notice anything? I had to part with Shaposhnikov. He is old-fashioned and does not quite understand the basics of Marxist-Leninist military science - the most advanced in the world. Yes, and Tymoshenko can not work with him. Nothing can be done: the new people's commissar is the new chief of the general staff. Shaposhnikov, on the other hand, was sent to the Bialystok balcony to build URs, but not very intensively. Let the Germans see that we are preparing for defense. So far everything is going well. The Germans would rather land in England!

Why doesn't Hitler land? You have to push it a little.

On August 23, an editorial in the Pravda newspaper, marking the anniversary of the pact, wrote: "The signing of the pact put an end to the hostility between Germany and the USSR, the hostility that was artificially fueled by warmongers ... After the collapse of the Polish state, Germany proposed to England and France to end the war. This proposal was supported by the Soviet government. But the German proposal was not

heard... We are neutral, neutral because of the Pact. This pact also gave a huge advantage to Germany,

for she can have full confidence in the tranquility of her eastern frontiers."

Indeed, everything is calm on the Soviet-German border, except for the feverish construction of airfields and warehouses on the Soviet side. But to the south there is something to be horrified by. The situation on the Soviet-Romanian border has already reached unprecedented tension. Both sides daily report incidents, skirmishes of border guards, violations of air and sea space. And before the landing in England, scheduled for September 15, which is so awaited in Moscow, there are still three weeks ...

On the night of August 23-24, the weather over the English Channel improved significantly, enabling Goering to resume the air offensive. The purpose of the night raid was to be aircraft factories and fuel depots on the outskirts of London. It was a fateful night that broke all Goering's plans for the final destruction of enemy aircraft. How this happened is still not exactly known. It is believed that the Germans made an accidental navigational error. But the fact remains - instead of the intended specific goals, Goering's pilots dropped bombs on the center of the English capital, destroying several houses and causing minor civilian casualties. The enraged British, naturally deciding that the bombing of residential areas of their capital was a deliberate act, quickly planned and carried out an act of retaliation.

On the evening of the next day, 80 heavy British bombers took to the air and headed for Berlin. The capital of the Reich lay under a thick layer of clouds. Having no experience of such operations, complicated by the conditions of blind flight, the British bombers went off course, and only half of them reached the target.

On August 25, 1940, the first bombs fell on Berlin. The material damage caused by them, of course, was negligible, but the moral effect was terrible. Berlin was surrounded by three air defense rings. The firing of anti-aircraft guns merged into a continuous roar and howl, but not a single enemy aircraft could be shot down. Everyone who needs it saw that night that German cities were practically defenseless against air strikes. Together with the bombs, leaflets rained down from the British bombers. "The war started by Hitler will continue as long as Hitler is in power and will end only after the destruction of Hitler and his regime." Combined with the bomb blasts, it was very effective propaganda.

Hitler urgently left his headquarters and arrived in the capital on August 26. It was necessary to somehow explain to the people what had happened and finally take concrete measures to defend the Ploiesti oil basin.

Having driven through the darkened capital, Hitler called a meeting with representatives of the command of the ground forces. The General Staff coordinated with the Fuhrer an order prepared specifically for the occupation of the Romanian oil regions.

On August 28 and 29, Berlin was again bombed. This time there were casualties among the population. According to official figures, ten people were killed and 29 were injured. Hitler went on a rampage. It turned out that the Germans did not have a strategic bomber equal to the English Lancaster or even the Wellington. The shock gripped the population of the capital. The newspapers demanded bloody retribution. Hitler personally ordered Goering, as a retribution, to shift the strike from British aviation to English cities [25]. It was easier said than done. The Germans did not have a strategic bomber. Moreover, the supply of ton and half-ton aerial bombs necessary for this was extremely limited and has so far been used only

to destroy the runways of the British Air Force. It was also necessary to regroup forces, redirecting them to a new task, which took time. But where to get the bombs? Stalin has nowhere else.

On August 29, in the Upper Belvedere, the summer residence of Prince Eugene of Savoy, the foreign ministers met to resolve the Hungarian-Romanian territorial disputes: Ribbentrop, Ciano, the Hungarian Chaco and the head of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, Manoilescu. When Mihai Manoilescu saw the prepared map, on which almost all of Transylvania was painted over in Hungarian colors, he lost consciousness and collapsed senselessly on ... the round table of the conference. An urgently called doctor brought the Romanian minister to his senses with the help of camphor, after which the agreement was signed.

All this, of course, led to an unprecedented explosion of nationalism and patriotism in Romania, which cost the crown to King Carol II. Having abdicated in favor of his eighteen-year-old son Mihai - the very same Mihai whom Stalin would later award for some unknown reason with the Order of Victory - the ex-king, together with his red-haired mistress Magda Lupescu, fled to Switzerland, stuffing ten wagons of a special train with palace junk. The young King Mihai appointed General Antonescu, leader of the fascist Iron Guard, as Prime Minister, who officially declared Romania a "fascist state ruled by a military dictatorship" and appealed to his friend Hitler for military assistance and cooperation "between the Romanian and German armed forces". As part of this cooperation, the Germans took over the protection of the oil region in order, as the agreement diplomatically stated, to protect this region "from the interference of third states."

Stalin had never seen such a fiddle under his nose in his life. All the humiliations that he experienced in his youth from his unforgettable boss, Colonel Vissarionov and accomplice in the robbery Kamo, could not be compared with the humiliation that the leader experienced from Hitler's quick operation to buy Hungary and Romania. At the same time, everyone received something, and Stalin was left without a "share". What he received in July, he no longer counted the shares.

The leader's anger was terrible. In retaliation for such an attitude, he immediately ordered the Comet to be stopped and returned to Murmansk, and if he refused, to be drowned. Interesting, what to heat? The Shch-423 submarine assigned for this purpose was hopelessly behind the raider due to a propeller failure near the support vessel. And in the area of the Bering Strait there were no longer any forces to force the captain of the 1st rank Eissen to obey the requirements of the Soviet authorities. Is that to sell it to the British? But it will cost you more.

The frightened local authorities, knowing full well who could only give the order to return the German cruiser, tried to scare Eissen with the presence of Japanese and American patrol ships in the Bering Strait. Nothing, Eissen smiled thinly, the Japanese are friends, the Americans are neutral. While he was negotiating, his sailors brazenly painted over the name "Danau". True, nothing new has yet been written.

In the note that followed from Moscow, it was irritably stated that "the USSR still has a lot of interests in Romania, and the German side was obliged to take this into account and consult with Moscow in advance." If the article on preliminary consultations, the note sarcastically pointed out, contains "some inconvenience or restrictions" for the Reich, then the Soviet government is ready to "revise or completely cancel" this article of the treaty. The robbers had already begun to squabble over prey, prejudging

the inevitability of an open fight.

While Moscow and Berlin were exchanging reproaches, three versions of the plan of attack on the USSR came to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, 1st Chief Quartermaster General Paulus, the same Paulus, whose name everyone in the USSR now knows

schoolboy.

Accepting the secret documents, the newly appointed general signed the secret documentation journal: received on September 3, 1940.

The day before, in Moscow, Stalin was persuaded to cancel the order to stop the German cruiser. The new chief of the general staff, General of the Army Kirill Meretskov, tried to prove to Stalin that, in essence, nothing terrible had happened, but, of course, Groza had to be corrected to take into account the new realities. In other words, it is necessary to simultaneously open hostilities in the south, in the Balkans, and in the direction of East Prussia. This will take some time, but, apparently, the Germans will not have time to complete preparations for the landing by September 15. The Italians are letting them down. On September 1, they were supposed to launch an offensive against Egypt from two sides: from Libya and from Abyssinia in order to saddle the Suez Canal, forcing the British to transfer large forces to Africa, thereby weakening the defense of the mother country.

According to calculations, about two weeks after the start of the Italian offensive, the Germans will begin the invasion. Our intelligence reports that all ports on the northern coast of France are jammed with barges and transports. Air and sea landing exercises are taking place everywhere. There is a transfer of additional military units to Norway, from where a simultaneous landing is expected, coinciding with the schedule with the throw across the English Channel. These parts go through the territory of Finland. They have their training camps in Poland. Meretskov knows that these units, undergoing reorganization in Poland and transiting through Finland, are disappearing somewhere. In any case, they have not yet appeared in Norway, although their destination, as is well established, is Norway. But he does not want to bother Stalin with such trifles for the time being. On the contrary, he recalls that during the air attack on England, the Germans had a problem with heavy bombs.

In order to assist them, they are asking us to send them about 2,000 heavy-caliber air bombs from 500 kg to a ton. Our task is to help the Germans in every possible way in their struggle with England, therefore, Meretskov emphasizes, knowing the opinion of the leader, to ship the bombs and let the cruiser [26] into the Pacific Ocean. To do everything so that the Germans carried out the invasion of England. However, the Italian offensive would be able to reach Iraq very quickly, and the problem of the air base in Mosul would be solved.

Stalin listens to his chief of staff, agreeing, in principle, with him in everything. A year of war has already passed, and how much has been accomplished! Molotov was right when closing the session of the Supreme Soviet: "The Soviet Union has achieved great success, but it does not intend to stop there." Today is better than yesterday, and tomorrow is better than today!

On September 4, Hitler unexpectedly decides to speak to the masses. The British air raids apparently played a significant role in this, so that it became necessary once again to remind the German people that England was finished long ago, and at the same time to sum up the first year of the war, filled with brilliant victories of German weapons.

No one had ever seen Hitler, who was famous for his almost complete lack of a sense of humor, so overflowing with caustic irony.

"In order to describe Mr. Churchill," Hitler began his speech, "there are no sufficiently precise expressions in the literary German language. However, in the Bavarian dialect there is such an expression - it is "Krumpfhenn", which means a chicken that is still twitching its paws when its head is already cut off.

Those who had never heard jokes from the Fuhrer, those sitting in the hall were speechless for a moment, and then burst into laughter and hysterical applause. Thus, it was possible to somewhat defuse the situation in the hall, but Hitler understood that he still would not be able to evade answers to the two main questions that occupied the thoughts of the people sitting in the gigantic hall: when and whether there would be an invasion of England, and what would be done to prevent air strikes on Berlin and other German cities?

Slowly uttering each word, Hitler spoke, ringing with the metal of his voice: "In England now everyone is excited with curiosity and ask: "Why is he not coming? "Be calm. He's coming! He

is coming!".

Considering that he had given his listeners a completely unambiguous answer, the Fuhrer turned to the question of the bombings:

"Now Mr. Churchill is demonstrating his new original idea - night air raids. Mr. Churchill thought of this, not because the raids now promise high efficiency, but because his air force cannot fly over Germany in the daytime ... while German planes appear over England daily ...

Now we will respond to every night raid with a night raid! If British aircraft drop two, three or four tons of bombs on us, then in one night we will drop 150, 250, 300 or 400 tons of bombs on them!!!

A new hysterical ovation interrupted the Fuhrer's words. Women especially raged, expressing their approval of the leader's words with loud cries of delight.

"If they announce," Hitler continued to shout, heating himself and the audience, "that they are going to intensify their raids on our cities, then we announce that we will completely wipe out their cities from the face of the earth!"

At this point, the Fuhrer's speech was again interrupted. Young nurses - representatives of various charitable organizations and the "Mercy" society, who make up a good third of the audience, howled in some already purely sexual outburst and gave the leader a new insanely frenzied ovation.

Hitler's eyes burned with hellfire, sweat rolled down his pale face, his hair stuck together in a slanting bang fell on his forehead. "The hour has come when one of us must be crushed!! But it will not be National Socialist Germany that will be crushed!!" "Never! Never!" the hall roared in response.

In distant Moscow, Stalin, grimacing at the cries of "Heil!" flying from the speakers, turned off the receiver and sent the interpreter away with a gesture of his hand. "He is very nervous about something," the leader remarked, referring to Philip Golikov and Lavrenty Beria, who were sitting in his office. The chiefs of the two most powerful intelligence services met in Stalin's office to report on the latest reports that came from Berlin. Hitler decided to start a merciless bombardment of English cities, and simply wipe London off the face of the earth in order to paralyze the will of the British to resist on the eve of the invasion. It would rather happen! Apparently, on the bridgeheads of southern England, an unprecedented

a meat grinder into which the Wehrmacht will have to throw its vaunted divisions one after another. It is also worrying that at any moment a war could break out between the USSR and England, and this is completely useless at this stage. British intelligence has clearly sniffed out everything about Basis Nord, and there is information that the British are preparing an air strike on the base and generally threaten to block all approaches to Murmansk and Polyarny from the sea. English protests are raining down on the violation of neutrality by the Soviet Union. After the German landing, they will obviously not be up to it, and we will automatically turn into allies. Temporarily, of course!

Therefore, with some sense of relief, Stalin next day read a telegram transmitted from the German Foreign Ministry to Ambassador Schulenburg, intercepted and deciphered by the radio interception service of the NKVD.

"State secret.

Berlin 5 September 1940

No. 1604.

Our navy intends to abandon the base provided to it on the Murmansk coast, since at present it has enough bases in Norway. Please notify the Russians of this decision, on behalf of the Imperial Government, thank them for their invaluable help ... "

The Germans are still great and smart! Everyone understands. Relations with them are excellent so far, despite some rough edges that have arisen due to their so abrupt behavior in Romania. Schulenburg conferred for hours with Molotov about the remnants of the territory of Lithuania, which the Germans still hold, although by all the rules this territory should go to us. The Germans offered to give this strip to Lithuania in exchange for appropriate territorial compensation from the USSR. But we firmly stated that territorial compensation from the USSR was unacceptable, and offered the Germans to sell us the rest of Lithuania for 3,860,000 gold dollars, guaranteeing the payment of this amount within two years in gold or goods of Germany's choice.

In addition, we came up with a diplomatic initiative to conclude a general agreement between the USSR, Germany, Italy and Japan and to annul the ugly anti-Comintern pact. The Germans agree in principle, but they frame the future agreement with a host of tricks and conditions. But nothing can be kept secret! Just a disgrace! The press has already sniffed out about these negotiations and weaves God knows what about them! On September 7, I had to publish an official refutation through TASS in Pravda:

"The Japanese newspaper Khotsi disseminates a report about a conversation allegedly held at the end of August between Comrade Stalin and the German ambassador Count Schulenburg on the issue of concluding an agreement between the USSR, Germany, Italy and Japan and on the annulment of the Anti-Comintern Pact. TASS is authorized to declare that this whole report of the newspaper Khotsi is fictitious from beginning to end, since Comrade Stalin has not had any meeting with Mr. Schulenburg for the last six or seven months.

Stalin personally wrote the text of the refutation. Everything is true: he really did not meet with Schulenburg - Molotov did it. But that's not the point right now! An intelligence message came that, starting from August 30, transports and self-propelled barges went to the ports on the English Channel coast from the German ports of the North Sea. On Stalin's table

lay down the translation of the directive signed by Keitel on 3 September.

Something moved in the suspicious soul of the dictator: German operational documents were painfully quickly on his desk. But he pushed that thought away: our intelligence service is excellent. Keitel's directive read:

"The earliest date for the invasion fleet to go to sea is September 20th in order to begin landing on September 21st ..."

Yes, this all sounds quite concrete. It is necessary to have time to prepare the army around this time.

On the evening of September 6, Admiral Raeder again made his way to Hitler, trying to dissuade the Fuhrer from the planned adventure. Namely, this is how the admiral, as you know, evaluated the operation "Sea Lion". The admiral had already bored Hitler with his eternal whining. The question of invading England is out of the question. But the English fleet dominates the strait! The British bombard the north French ports day and night.

The Fuhrer interrupts Raeder. He looks at the exhausted, pale, aristocratic face of Raeder that has lost its former gloss, and he feels sorry for him. But you can't trust him with a secret. The fleet is permeated with the ideas of monarchism, and hence with British agents. All royalists, sometimes without realizing it, are in the clutches of the British. Hitler tries to reassure the admiral with an evasive phrase that "perhaps the defeat of England can be completed without an invasion," and then abruptly changes the subject of the conversation.

On Saturday, September 7, 625 bombers and 648 fighters took off from German airfields in northern France and Holland, roaring with engines. The target was London. Formed in crane wedges, the squadrons went north, disappearing into the approaching twilight.

The raid was terrible. The previous bombings of Warsaw and Rotterdam can be called pinpricks in comparison with the hell that has fallen on the British capital. The entire dock area was a huge, raging whirlwind of flame. All the railroads leading from London to the south, so important for defense in the event of an invasion, were blocked. One of the districts of the capital - Silvertown - was in the ring of fire. The population had to be evacuated by water.

After dark, at about 20.00, the second wave of German bombers began to operate, then the third. The bombardment continued uninterruptedly until half past five on the morning of 8 September. Alarms blared on all British airwaves. The General Staff, the command of the fleet of the mother country, Churchill himself and his closest advisers were sure that such a deadly bombardment meant that the invasion was inevitable and would happen in the next 24 hours.

The headquarters of the defense of the metropolis transmitted through its communication channels the conditional word "Cromwell" - the invasion is inevitable. The fleet and aircraft rushed into the strait. Nothing and no one. In the fighting enthusiasm, a blow was struck on the ports of Northern France. Several transports and about 30 barges were sunk, several warehouses with cargo for landing were destroyed.

British agents in occupied France broadcast: no troops were being loaded onto transports. Calm down! But no one heard it.

The dawn of September 8 brought to light a terrible picture of the burning capital of England. Oceans of flame raged over the city. The sirens of fire engines and ambulances blared. Despite all the courage and dedication, firefighters could not localize the flames. The number of dead and wounded grew. Goering's jubilant voice boomed through the crackle of short-wave interference: "The historic hour has come when our Air Fleet for the first time struck right in the heart of the enemy!"

On Sunday, September 8, at 19.00 German bombers reappeared over London. The bombardment continued throughout the night. The unextinguished fires of the previous bombardment were filled with new oceans of flame. Houses and factories were destroyed. People died. The first figures came in: 900 people died in two nights, 2,500 were injured.

On Monday, September 9, everything happened again. More than 200 German bombers dropped bombs on the British capital all night long, no longer looking for military targets and dropping bombs anywhere.

German bombers met almost no resistance over London, since almost all the formations of the British Air Force were concentrated in the south of the country, expecting an invasion from minute to minute. British aviation concentrated all its attention on the ports of Northern France, inflicting blow after blow on them.

Negligible losses over London again gave Goering a reason to once again declare that British aviation was completely suppressed. But Admiral Raeder did not share this point of view at all. The British air force and navy dominate the channel and the skies above it, as the entire German air force is bombing London. In such a situation, it is simply impossible to prepare for an invasion within the prescribed time frame. The admiral again asked for a delay.

While Hitler pondered the reports of his commanders-in-chief of the naval and air forces, trying to decide which of them was misleading him, the answer came by itself: air raid sirens howled: more than 100 British bombers appeared on the night of September 10-11 over Berlin and bombed the capital of the Reich for several hours, forcing the Fuhrer himself to sit out in a bomb shelter. Bombs fell on the Reichstag and the Reich Chancellery, one bomb exploded in the garden of the Goebbels house, another set fire to the famous Berlin Opera, and the university library burned down. Ah, how is it? OK then! On the same night, specially trained crews for the bombing of "point" targets were included in the attack formations of German bombers:

the royal palace, the residence of the prime minister, the parliament building, the Admiralty complex.

The crews confirmed their high skill - two bombs, one of which was a slow-acting bomb, hit the king's residence.

On the morning of September 11, Churchill addressed the nation by radio. Warning that an invasion of England could happen at any moment, the prime minister said: "We must regard next week as the most important in our history. It is comparable to the days when the Spanish Armada appeared in the strait ... Or when Nelson stood between us and Napoleon's Grand Army.

In Stalin's personal cinema, a montage of German and English newsreels is shown.

Subject: blitz over London. Houses are collapsing, people are rushing about, explosions of aerial bombs raise tons of debris and clouds of black smoke into the sky, the Junkers effectively enter at the peak, the bombs, gradually decreasing, in series of six go to the ground. Unexploded bomb close-up. What's the matter? Yep, Soviet markings. The Germans use Soviet bombs. That's what you need, you bastards. You can protest!

Stalin is excited. He sniffs loudly, constantly breaking matches, lighting his pipe. "Young man! - he says with a strong accent, which indicates the strongest excitement. "Young Hitler!" He is the real icebreaker of the world proletarian revolution!"

Molotov, Zhdanov, Beria, Malenkov and Meretskov sitting in the hall are reverently silent. There are no words to express my admiration for the foresight of the leader. A year and a half ago, Stalin thought and calculated everything, assigning Hitler the role of an icebreaker of the revolution. And everything happens as outlined by the Great Leader. No doubt the landing in England must begin at any moment. Not later than October 1, the Red Army will be ready for action on a global scale.

On September 13, having arrived in the Kremlin, Stalin learned another piece of good news. The Italian troops finally went on the offensive and invaded Egypt. The British are retreating all along the front. The offensive is supported by a powerful Italian fleet, which will force the British to urgently transfer large forces of their fleet to the Mediterranean Sea, exposing the mother country. And then the Germans will go across the English Channel. Still, Hitler is not a fool!

Another concern. Increasingly alarming intelligence reports about the concentration of German troops in Finland and Romania. As long as you do not want to quarrel with Hitler, you need to deal with him in this matter. But he's still great!

On September 14, in Berlin, Hitler held a conference with representatives of the high command of the armed forces. Even before the start of the conference, Admiral Raeder managed to "hand over" the Fuhrer his memorandum, which, in particular, stated that "the current situation in the air cannot create conditions for the implementation of Operation Sea Lion, since the risk is still very high."

Hitler was calm and focused. "A successful landing followed by the occupation of England," he said, "would have ended the war in a short time. True, England is already dying of exhaustion, so there is no need to tie the landing to any specific date ... But a long war is also undesirable ...

The fleet has already reached the required state. The actions of the Luftwaffe are generally beyond praise. Four or five days of good weather will bring decisive results ... We have a good chance of bringing England to its knees.

"So what's the deal? Why is the landing delayed? the cold shine of the general's monocles silently asked, while Raeder, who had turned pale, wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. How to understand the Fuhrer's words that the fleet has already reached the "state necessary for landing"?

"There are difficulties," Hitler explained. - Enemy fighters have not yet been completely destroyed. Reports of our successes do not always give a complete and reliable picture, although the enemy suffered heavy losses.

Hitler paused and announced the decision: "Despite all the successes, the prerequisites for Operation Sea Lion have not yet been created."

Summarizing what has been said, the Fuhrer summed up the following:

"It is necessary to step up air strikes. Our air strikes had a stunning effect... Even if victory in the air is achieved by continuing the raids for another 10-12 days, mass panic and hysteria may arise in England. This will be joined by the fear of landing. The fear of landing should not disappear."

Hitler said the most important thing in the last phrase. All his thoughts were occupied with how to make Stalin believe in the inevitability of an invasion of England and at the same time not pay too high a price. But is it possible to constantly postpone the landing, while maintaining the conviction of everyone in its inevitability? Let's listen to the generals. They sometimes have very original ideas. Hitler invited those present to express their opinion.

Aviation General Eshonnek was the first to speak. To hasten the process of causing panic in England, he asked for permission to bomb densely populated residential areas of London, while guaranteeing a "mass panic" in the British capital.

Then Raeder spoke. This one will not let you down, because he is more afraid of landing than death. Indeed, from the very first words, the admiral began to speak of "a very big risk." The situation in the air cannot change significantly for the better until the next days favorable for landing, scheduled for September 24-27. It's better to postpone everything at once to October 8, Raeder suggested and added: "And if by that time the aviation has won a complete victory, it will even be possible to refuse to conduct a landing ..."

Hitler interrupted his commander-in-chief of the naval forces with a wave of his hand: "No, no. We will focus on September 27th. So the earliest deadline for making a preliminary decision is September 17th. Only after that, focus on October 8. Raeder is pleased: to postpone the landing to October 8 means, in fact, to cancel it, at least this year. In October, two days of good weather in the strait are very rare.

Knowing the truth, Brauchitsch and Halder are silent. However, Brauchitsch noted that for landing in England he did not need either aircraft or navy - he would land under the cover of a smoke screen. Jeschonnek and Raeder are covered with spots.

Smiling softly, Hitler announces to both that they are free and stays with Brauchitsch, Halder, Keitel and Jodl. All your own, you can not break a comedy. The situation is complex. For three months now, Stalin has been carrying out endless maneuvers along the entire western border, as close as possible to a combat situation. At any moment you can expect surprises.

The directions of the main attacks were clearly outlined: against Romania with the simultaneous occupation of Bulgaria and from the Bialystok balcony - to Warsaw, with access to the Oder. Auxiliary strikes against East Prussia and Finland are expected. Our forces in this direction are completely insufficient to counter Moscow.

Hitler reassures the military. Russia expected our "exhaustion" in the war in the West. But Stalin sees that his calculations have failed. "Exhaustion" did not occur. We have achieved the greatest successes without great losses. This had the desired effect on Stalin. The realization of our power had already influenced Stalin's behavior towards Finland and the Balkans. He is waiting for a landing in England to start active operations, and let him wait. It is necessary to speed up the transfer of troops to Rumania and the Governor-General and speed up the drawing up of plans for the crushing of Russia. As for the disembarkation, we decided everything at this meeting ...

In order to justify the confidence of the Fuhrer and prove to all skeptics who is the master in the sky over England, Goering decided to make an unprecedented daytime raid on London on September 15th. About 200

bombers under cover of at least 600 fighters. All this armada, shining with duralumin and glass of cabins under the rays of the dim September sun, went in menacing wedges towards the capital of Britain. This Sunday in September was destined to be the day of the most bitter disappointment in the capabilities of the Luftwaffe. Effectively using radar, the British command clearly made it clear to the doubters that the British aviation was not only not destroyed, but became stronger than it was.

Formations of British fighters in an unexpected number for the Germans, coming out from under the sun, intercepted the German armada on the way to the capital. Only a few bombers managed to break through to London. The rest were either scattered or destroyed.

While Göring continued to boastfully claim that he needed another 4-5 days to finally finish off the British, another event occurred that showed Hitler that he was paying perhaps too high a price for disinforming Stalin.

On September 16, in the Antwerp area, German troops conducted a major landing exercise. Personnel and military equipment were loaded onto transports and barges, which, under the cover of destroyers, went to sea in order, after passing about 50 miles, to land troops on one of the sections of the Dutch coast, reminiscent of the relief of the coast of southern England. Unexpectedly, British bombers hit the oncoming convoy. Within minutes, the convoy was destroyed. Losses in personnel exceeded the planned losses of the first wave of landing in a real landing in England.

Although the Germans kept this catastrophe completely secret, the intelligence services of many countries got wind of it. The keen eyes of Soviet intelligence spotted three long trains with seriously wounded who arrived in the suburbs of Berlin. Most of the wounded were burned. There were no land battles where the Germans could have suffered such losses, and there could not be. After analyzing the information, intelligence made the erroneous conclusion that there had been an attempt to land in England, which ended in failure and heavy losses.

The message about the unsuccessful attempt to land in England came to Moscow in the midst of an operational meeting, which was held by Stalin with the chief of the general staff Meretskov and People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko, who urgently flew to Moscow from Kiev.

On the agenda was the most important issue of accurately determining the date of the start of Operation Thunderstorm. Everyone agreed that October 1 would be the ideal date to complete the operation before the start of winter. However, there were problems. If the Germans start landing in the 20th of September, and the weather forecast says that in the 20th of September you can expect three whole days of perfect weather from September 25 to 29, then it is a little early to invade Europe on October 1. Better than 10. With a simultaneous blow to the rest of Finland.

The army, in principle, is ready, although, of course, there is an acute shortage of tanks and vehicles. The fleet, which has begun building giant battleships and battlecruisers, is eating up stock steel, disrupting the tank program. Meretskov is clearly saying too much.

"And without these 5,000 tanks," Stalin asks, "can't you start the operation?" His voice is wistful and sad. He sees perfectly well that Army General Meretskov is not the person he needs. There is no such steel Bolshevik core in it. He is afraid of "Thunderstorm" in the same way that Shaposhnikov was afraid. But who will replace him?

"Of course we can, Comrade Stalin," Meretskov replies cheerfully, realizing that he has gone too far. "But given the inevitable losses..."

The General Staff recently submitted to him, Stalin, a detailed calculation of the "Thunderstorm" with an indication of the expected losses. The operation was supposed to involve 5 million people, 11 thousand tanks, 35,000 guns and 9-10 thousand aircraft. The duration of the operation is 3-4 months. Losses in people are tentatively estimated at one and a half million people. In fact, the General Staff believed that two million, but did not dare to give this figure to Stalin. Stalin knew about this, of course, and only chuckled.

General Golikov, a fanatical supporter of the implementation of the "Thunderstorm", most of all afraid that Stalin himself, in his well-known cowardice, would refuse it, made it a rule not to disturb the leader with messages that run counter to Stalin's global intentions.

In the office of Golikov - the GRU - there were various people, most of whom were still left from the unfortunate Ivan Proskurov. None of them, of course, knew anything about Groz, but were simply responsible for their section of information. Information flocked to Golikov, and he already reported it upstairs - to Stalin and the chief of the general staff.

Golikov selected this information carefully. Well, why, let's say, bother the leader with the message that the headquarters of the army group, heading to Romania, passed through Czechoslovakia in civilian clothes? They transported their entire household in containers, which were marked with agricultural goods. There is an intensive construction of new highways in Poland. So what? Let them build. Why raise a tantrum over this? The headquarters of the 4th, 12th and 18th armies were transferred to the east. Fine. How many divisions does the Germans have on our borders? It was 7. And now? 37! Thirty divisions have been redeployed in the last month and a half. Well, what are 37 divisions? Funny. Dust. We will blow it away and not notice. And what do we have in the world? Everything is fine. The Italians advance, the British flee in panic to the Suez Canal. Perhaps they will have to evacuate their entire army from the Middle East, and this cannot be done without the transfer of large fleet formations from the mother country to the Mediterranean Sea. And then ... At that moment, Golikov was urgently called to the phone. He returned with an expression of bewilderment on his face. A message has just come in: the Germans tried to land in England, but were driven back, having suffered heavy losses. This was a surprise. If this information is reliable, then it is necessary to immediately bring the border districts to a state of highest alert. Timoshenko should urgently fly back to Kyiv to Zhukov. Shaposhnikov is located in Belarus. The rest stay put. Dissolving the meeting, Stalin remained with Beria, who had not uttered a word before, but only ominously gleamed his pince-nez glasses. Usually the reports of the chief of the NKVD dealt with issues that went beyond what the military and members of the Politburo were supposed to know. In this case, Beria, switching to Georgian, reported to the leader that his people had discovered a powerful leak of information coming from the People's Commissariat of Defense and the General Staff.

Leakage is putting it mildly. The flow, as in the mountain rivers of their native Caucasus. It turns out that even before the start of the conflict, the scoundrel Mannerheim had both of our operational plans on his desk: Meretskov's plan, based on the idea of a blitzkrieg, and Shaposhnikov's plan, which required thorough preparation, for which there was simply no time at that time. Nice things! 64 secret folders of documents, each with a thousand pages! All this must be copied and sent abroad!

Find out everyone who had access to the documents, and punish mercilessly, regardless of titles and merits. Beria asks for clarification: to punish everyone who had access to documents in general, or those who compiled these documents? Make a list, says Stalin, we'll see. But that's not all: a lieutenant colonel escaped from the headquarters of the Western Military District, taking with him a portfolio of documents related to the construction of fortified areas. All his immediate superiors and subordinates were arrested. And families, Stalin suggests, to be discourteous.

Stalin knows that the lieutenant colonel escaped on the instructions of the GRU in order to foist misinformation on the Germans about the large-scale construction of fortifications on our western borders, but Beria does not need to know this. But he knows something else that Stalin does not need to know about.

During the massive expropriations in the Baltic states, Zhdanov not only managed to appropriate about \$40 million worth of valuables for himself - it does not take much intelligence to do this - but also to transfer these valuables to Switzerland, which implies that he has a powerful personal intelligence network. Moreover, according to Beria, all this was done with the knowledge of the Leningrad Military District, commanded by Meretskov, the current chief of the general staff.

On September 17, General Paulus, who had been working for the past two weeks without sleep or rest, reported to Colonel General Halder his preliminary calculations regarding the attack on the USSR. The operation is risky, but possible. To do this, it is necessary to concentrate at least 110-120 divisions on the borders with the USSR and achieve strategic surprise, which, in turn, requires extensive measures to misinform the enemy. The very geography of the theater dictates the plan of the future operation. All Russian armies are deployed for the offensive. The Bialystok and Lemberg balconies look especially seductive, where a huge number of Russian forces are concentrated, a gigantic network of warehouses and airfields, and headquarters at all levels. Meanwhile, both of these balconies are easily destroyed by much smaller forces, since, in essence, they have no defense.

When two armies clash, both aiming for a swift advance, the one that starts first wins. The destruction of the Russian armies on the "balconies" will make it possible to enter the operational space with the rapid achievement of the final points of the operation: Moscow, Leningrad and the Volga, somewhere south of Stalingrad. The main thing is suddenness.

Halder listens attentively to his deputy as he considers a preliminary plan for a strategic deployment in the East.

The war is not over, and its continuation requires a choice between two options. Either a blow to England, having the Red Bear already prepared for a throw in the rear, or a blow to this bear, leaving a somewhat shell-shocked "lion" in the rear, not yet ready to jump over the canal and cling to the back of Germany. Only a madman could choose to attack England now. I wonder if they understand this in Moscow? Apparently not yet.

Ordering Paulus to continue work and making a more thorough calculation of forces in the directions and tasks of each type of troops, Halder took up current affairs. The defeat of the convoy conducting the landing exercises led Hitler to another outburst of rage, which, thank God, was directed against Goering.

Hitler ordered that the necessary documents be presented to him on the available aviation forces. He himself will decide how to use these forces.

While this dispute was going on, on the night of September 17, British aircraft bombarded the entire coastal area between Le Havre and Antwerp. The bombardment from the air was supplemented by volleys of heavy English guns across the strait. The number of wounded and killed grew. The fleet was losing specialists, the army was losing first-class trained soldiers.

Halder himself was beginning to think that the German armed forces were paying too high a price for misleading Stalin.

In the evening he reported his thoughts to Hitler. The Fuhrer was calm and even at times gave the Chief of the General Staff his sad smile. Yes, of course, he agreed, it is necessary to remove troops and ships from there, but in such a way that Moscow does not notice this.

Halder nodded in understanding. By my order, during this time, the colonel general reported, a whole set of measures has been developed that will not allow even the most first-class intelligence to establish that we are not going to carry out an invasion. Quite right, the Fuhrer perked up, it is necessary to continue the raids on London so that the British expect an invasion every day. The Fuhrer still had a glimmer of hope that the British, unable to withstand the daily bombings, would sue for peace, and then it would be possible either to somehow agree with Stalin, or, much more pleasantly, to fall upon him with all his might, put an end to Bolshevism, which had so vilely corrupted socialism.

Halder reported to him on the work of Paulus. The Fuhrer winced. The main blow, he objected, should be inflicted on Ukraine, and not on Moscow. Firstly, we will secure the Romanian oil regions, and secondly, we will seize the economically richest region, cut off all the main water arteries and take possession of the strategically important Black Sea ports, creating the preconditions for connecting with the Italians in the Middle East. All this is true, Halder agreed, but we will not destroy the Russian army. And in the event of our attack on Moscow, Stalin would certainly throw all the remaining reserves to her defense. We will destroy them, take Moscow, and Ukraine itself will fall into our hands.

All right, said Hitler, we will discuss this later. If only he himself did not move to active actions before us. And take care, General, that no one gets wind of our plans, at least at this stage.

Hitler's concern was well founded. The secret reports of the Gestapo unambiguously indicated that a fairly large percentage of the country's population was in poorly concealed opposition to the Fuhrer's regime. Moreover, the social and class composition of this opposition is very extensive. Especially dangerous, of course, are the aristocrats, who do not hide their bewilderment that the post of German chancellor, usually reserved for people of their circle, was taken by an upstart from the former lumpen.

Having a huge number of equally well-born relatives in England, they are acutely experiencing the "fratricidal war", which, in their opinion, Hitler started because of his low birth. Complete idiots! As if the flames of the world war that the Kaiser waged against his two beloved cousins, Georgie and Nicky, had not blazed recently.

This could be ignored if these same aristocrats, by virtue of their positions, did not know too much. Who are the people of his inner circle: Halder, Brauchitsch, Raeder, not to mention the lower echelon? All the offspring of ancient noble families, whose ancestors used to serve kings and kaisers. And the industry bigwigs, who listen more to what the blood-sucking Jews of Wall Street and the City, bloated with gold, will say than to the words of their Fuhrer? What an obstruction they gave him regarding the program of "Aryanization" of Jewish property, when he wanted to transfer the money and real estate confiscated from the Jews to the German industrialists!

The aged von Thyssen dared to tell him straight out that this was not how things were done. No self-respecting firm would take Jewish money raised in this way. This will compromise them in the eyes of world business, close banks and markets to them.

A nail in a chair sticks out in Berlin, the United States Embassy, stuffed, according to Himmler, with spies. But not a single spy has yet been caught. And what kind of Americans are spies? They are all in their eternal business. Where to buy, where to sell. The most active is not the military and naval attache, as in all respectable embassies, but the commercial attaché, forty-eight-year-old Sam Edison Woods, an engineer and businessman.

He enters bank offices and aristocratic salons. Gestapo after all

surveillance weakened him: the commercial attache acted too openly and widely. And in vain, because it was Woods who was the resident of American intelligence in Berlin, although there was no intelligence in America at that time, but there was an information service of the State Department. However, in competition with such powerful and global intelligence services as the intelligence services of the USSR, Germany and England, the Americans almost always emerged victorious, learning everything first.

Experts explain this paradox by the fact that American intelligence, unlike European intelligence, had almost no military personnel and was not burdened by political "insanity" and Victorian conservatism.

Woods acted so cunningly and calmly that until December 1941, only two documents were filed in his Gestapo dossier, one of which spoke about the anecdote told by Woods about the Fuhrer, gleaned from Life magazine, and the other about his frequent visits to hippodrome.

But the chief Gestapo never found out. Woods had a friend who belonged to the most well-born part of the German aristocracy and had huge connections in the Ministry of Economy and in the Reichsbank. The aristocrat had no less influential connections in the High Command of the Wehrmacht, stuffed with his close and distant relatives. As usual, the aristocrat despised Hitler and hated his "shopkeeper" regime.

So Hitler, not favoring the German aristocracy, was absolutely right, but he had the guts to do with the aristocrats as Lenin did with the Russian aristocracy, exterminating them almost without exception.

Back in August 1940, a friend of the American commercial attache sent him a theater ticket. When the lights went out in the hall, he slipped a piece of paper into the pocket of Woods' jacket. At home, the American took out a note from his pocket, which read: "Conferences were held in Hitler's main apartment regarding preparations for war against Russia."

Woods immediately forwarded this information to the United States Department of State. US Secretary of State Hull reported this to President Roosevelt. Hull himself was inclined to regard this message as German disinformation.

But Roosevelt saw things differently. Back in August 1939, the American president predicted a Soviet-German war, believing that on such a small continent as Europe, two such voracious predators as Stalin and Hitler could not get along.

Roosevelt - the 32nd President of the United States - calculated the long term. Stalin and Hitler both dream of world domination and see no other means for this than tanks. They stand in each other's way, and the mighty British Empire stands in their way.

Being an outstanding intriguer and, as is typical of all dictators, considering himself a great politician, Stalin, fanning another fire in Europe, hopes to warm his hands on him. But any of his careless steps is a clash with Germany, no matter how much sympathy Hitler and Stalin may have for each other.

More recently, in mid-July 1940, FBI chief Edgar Hoover handed over to the State Department a curious document saying that on September 17, 1939, immediately after the partition of Poland, Stalin and Hitler met secretly in Lvov, where they signed a top-secret military agreement, making a great impression on each other.

This message seriously alarmed everyone who had the right to read it, although many expressed doubt about the very fact of the meeting, referring to the very reliable information about the whereabouts of both Stalin and Hitler on that day. However, was there

whether such a meeting or not is not a matter of principle. No matter how much Kaiser Wilhelm secretly and openly met with the Russian emperor, no matter how much they hugged, flaunting family ties and turning to "you" - this did not delay the war for a day, because wars and military alliances have their own laws. The tighter the tyrants embrace, the more bloody wars break out between them.

Therefore, Woods' message that there was talk in Hitler's inner circle about an attack on the USSR formed part of the scheme for forecasting international events drawn up by the President of the United States. This message, despite all the doubts of the State Department, became the most important prerequisite for planning the future activities of the president.

A coded message flew to Woods in Berlin, demanding the most thorough collection and investigation of information about Hitler's plans, paying special attention to the possibility of disinformation on the part of the Germans. Meanwhile, at the next meeting in the darkness of the cinema, Woods was given a sensational message: under the cover of devastating raids on England, Hitler was preparing for a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. After analyzing the information received, State Department experts reported to Roosevelt that German disinformation was wafting a mile away.

Urged from Washington, Woods took the risk of an unscheduled meeting with his informant. How reliable is their information? The aristocrat assured Woods that the information was received from persons who deserve complete trust. This person, repeated the informant, belongs to a narrow circle of especially trusted officers in the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

Although the State Department and even the FBI continued to express very strong doubts about the reliability of the information obtained, Roosevelt believed Woods implicitly. On September 18, through personal communication channels, this information was transmitted to Churchill.

At his dacha in Kuntsevo, Stalin, lying on the couch, looks with pleasure at the book just sent from the printing house by two economists, Varga and Mendelssohn, "New data for the work of V. I. Lenin "Imperialism - the highest stage of capitalism".

A dozen such books are published in the Soviet Union a year, but this one was all the more interesting because, on the personal instructions of Stalin, for the first time, in confirmation of the correctness of Lenin, quotations from Hitler were cited in it, in particular, an interview with the Fuhrer to a correspondent of the London newspaper Daily Express on February 11 1933, where the newly minted chancellor, with characteristic simplicity, complains about Germany's lack of colonies. "We need colonies to the same extent as other powers," the Fuhrer complained to an English journalist, and since Germany does not have colonies, and those that were taken away under the Treaty of Versailles, it is necessary to seize new ones - through annexations.

It was precisely Hitler's love for annexations that was for Stalin the surest proof of the irrefutable and absolute rightness of the great teacher. It was especially easy to believe in this also because Stalin loved annexations no less than his Berlin opponent and certainly could not understand how someone could not love annexation.

Having plunged unfortunate Russia into a state that has no analogue even in the history of the most gloomy oriental despots of antiquity, Stalin maniacally led her along the path outlined by Lenin. Lenin managed to convince him of the incurability of the ailments of capitalism, infected him with a fiery faith in the world revolution and in the creation of a world socialist system on the ruins of collapsed capitalism. Lenin instilled in him a tendency to see world conditions as nothing more than a replica of Russian conditions—irreconcilable and ignorant of the middle path.

Lenin conveyed to him a limited "party" approach to all issues and his absolute lack of understanding of the theory of the modern state, where the main wealth is each individual person.

It seemed that Stalin would only laugh at those who tried to convince him of the possible fatal mistake of Lenin, who mistook the infantile cry of newborn capitalism for his death rattle. But somehow, looking through the emigrant magazine "Will of Russia", published in Prague, Stalin came across an article by some old-time philosopher, who, it is not clear how, escaped a well-deserved execution. Daring to argue with Ilyich, he wrote: "Imperialism is not a function or phase of capitalism. It existed before capitalism and is a characteristic feature of underdeveloped but military-powered nations ruled by a caste that seeks autocracy both within its own country and abroad.

Stalin underlined this paragraph with a red pencil and put an exclamation mark in the margin, which indicated that the leader admired the completeness of the wording, simple in content and accessible in form. He honored this place with a bookmark and left the magazine in his bookcase.

Putting aside the advance copy of the book, Stalin got up from the sofa and, going to the desktop, once again carefully re-read the document transmitted by the NKVD radio interception service. It was Ribbentrop's telegram, sent to Ambassador Schulenburg as early as September 16th.

Stalin never asked himself the question of how it was possible, with the help of radio interception, to receive a document sent by wire telegraph. The NKVD classified sources even from the great leader of all peoples. In reality, the NKVD managed to recruit an adviser to the German embassy in Moscow, the closest employee of Count von Schulenburg himself - Gustav Hilger, who handed over all the secret documentation of the embassy to the disposal of Beria's department.

As it turned out later, Hilger worked with the same zeal for the Soviet GRU, and with even greater zeal for his true masters - the British, in fact, drawing Schulenburg himself into his activities, deftly playing on the mixed feelings of patriotism of the old German count and his internal rejection of the Nazi mode. The document lying on Stalin's desk stated:

"Berlin, September 16, 1940.

Ambassador personally!

Please visit Herr Molotov on the afternoon of September 21 and, unless you receive other instructions by that time, inform him orally and, as it were, by the way, preferably in a conversation on some random topic, the following:

The continued penetration of British aircraft into the airspace of Germany and the territories occupied by it forces the defense of certain installations to be strengthened, primarily in the north of Norway. Part of this reinforcement is the transfer of an anti-aircraft artillery battalion there, along with its support. When searching for transfer routes, it turned out that the least difficult route for this purpose would be through Finland. The division will presumably be unloaded on September 22 near Haparanda, and then transported to Norway ...

We want to inform the Soviet government of this step in advance. We assume and ask for confirmation that the Soviet government will react to this message.

as top secret. Report the fulfillment of the order by telegraph.

Ribbentrop".

In fact, there is nothing special in this document. The Germans are transferring troops to the Norwegian bridgeheads for the upcoming invasion. It is surprising that such a simple matter is furnished with such "antics" and "jumps". Apparently, part of the troops will be left in Finland. But if there are German troops there, it could lead to an unplanned conflict with Germany. Although, however, especially worry about this should not. The invasion, which should start any minute, and so will make this collision inevitable. The turmoil raised by reconnaissance on September 16 subsided somewhat. The Germans did not invade. Something happened during their exercises: either something exploded on its own, or the British caught them. But there is, of course, some very large catastrophe that could delay the start of the invasion. This is not bad, because it will give us the opportunity to better prepare.

Timoshenko reports that by September 27 the Red Army will be brought to a state of the highest readiness. Another concern. Information is flowing that the Germans are preparing the formalization of an official allied bloc, involving Italy there, which is not so important, since the attack on Italy is provided for by the Thunderstorm plan, and Japan, which I would not like at all.

What kind of "Thunderstorm" is there, if in the future the opening of a second front in the East. So far, we do not yet have enough strength to immediately restore order in Europe and Asia. And the position of Japan is still not really clear. Smiles, breaths, omissions and nothing concrete.

On September 19, Hitler gave the order to suspend the concentration of the invasion fleet in the ports of Northern France in order to "minimize the loss of ship tonnage from enemy air strikes." The landing was again postponed, this time sometime in the spring of 1941.

The commanders in Northern France are bombarding Halder with telephone calls - the situation is becoming simply unbearable due to the uncertainty placed before them. mission troops. What is the exact start date for Operation Sea Lion? There is no need to panic, the chief of the general staff reassures them, the Fuhrer will make a decision. The invasion was delayed mainly because of bad weather. The fleet rejoices - favorable weather in the strait will not come until next summer. By this time, it will be possible to put in order the entire materiel of the fleet, and most importantly, to put into operation two newest battleships - Bismarck and Tirpitz, which surpass all British ships of this class in their operational and tactical characteristics.

Reassuring the commanders in the West, Halder looks more and more anxiously at the map of the eastern frontier. Intelligence constantly reports on the concentration of Soviet troops along the new border with Finland.

The ships of the Soviet Baltic Fleet unexpectedly camouflaged their hulls and superstructures. Antonescu yells for help from Bucharest. Soviet troops can launch an invasion at any moment. He asks to transfer to Romania a sufficient number of German troops in order to somewhat cool the offensive impulse of the Kremlin. The Soviet Union has been in a militaristic frenzy for half a year now. From the Baltic to the Black Sea, exercises after exercises are being held in all districts in a situation as close as possible to combat conditions. Stalin, apparently having lost all caution, openly demonstrates his passionate desire to finally wait for the invasion of England and all the intentions associated with this desire.

And in the east, Germany has only 25 divisions. Of these, three are tank, one motorized and one cavalry, the rest are infantry. Only yesterday they were organized organizationally into Army Group B under the command of Field Marshal von Bock, nominally divided into three armies. The balance of forces is such that if Stalin started an offensive now, it is not difficult to imagine what could happen.

Fortunately, Stalin does not like to take risks. He likes to act for sure, but he does not know how to correctly calculate the risk. Thinking that he creates an additional margin of safety for himself and increases the safety factor, he, in fact, falls into a trap, as already happened in Finland. Now Stalin is waiting for the landing. All eyes of Soviet intelligence are turned to the coast of the English Channel. All the better! If only not to scare the Russians, so that they would not start an offensive right now ...

And military exercises continue throughout the European part of the USSR. Loudspeakers broadcast endless military marches and patriotic songs.

"If tomorrow is war, if tomorrow is a campaign, be ready for a campaign today!" - the invigorating sounds of this militant march, performed by district orchestras, meet Marshal Timoshenko, who is wandering around the districts and personally supervising the course of the exercises.

The exercises set quite specific tasks: infantry, tanks and aviation, interacting with each other, under the cover of artillery fire, break through the enemy's echeloned defenses with access to the operational space for a rapid offensive.

In a special order of the People's Commissar, the artillerymen were given the task of learning: to conduct a centralized, controlled, massive fire; organize interaction with infantry, tanks and aircraft; conduct complex types of firing on a topographic basis and at night.

In this order, the most remarkable thing was that the artillery was not assigned any tasks to fight enemy tanks, as if they did not exist, as if they had not crushed the Western Front quite recently. This happened because the Finns did not have tanks, and even more so near Verdun. As in the hard times of the cavalry that way, the enemy tanks were supposed to be suppressed by the rapid advance of our tanks. The network of tank farms, training grounds and tank training fields grew rapidly. Tank units were engaged from dawn to sunset. Right from the exercises, the tanks went to new places of concentration - closer to the border, spending precious motor resources, making throws on their own for 100 and 200 kilometers, just to be in time for the upcoming German landing in England.

The ground trembled, the dust covered the sky, across which armadas of planes floated. A rain of bombs fell on the training grounds, on conditional columns of enemy troops and accumulations of his equipment. The navies kept up with their counterparts in the army and aviation. Since the summer of 1940, exercises on ships and in coastal units have not stopped for a single day. U-boat fleets deployed covertly in forward positions, ignoring Swedish territorial waters as always. The country turned into a military camp cordoned off by the NKVD.

On September 24, Marshal Timoshenko arrived in the Kiev Special Military District, whose troops, according to the Thunderstorm plan, were the first to strike, cutting off Germany from Romanian oil, and by and large from the Balkans.

The People's Commissar was met by the commander of the district, General of the Army Zhukov. Cruel and rude, with a penchant for the most unbridled tyranny, who had no military

education, in addition to the school of cavalry non-commissioned officers during the First World War, he liked Stalin during the events at Khalkhin Gol.

However, Stalin drew attention not at all to the fact that Zhukov almost gave the Red Army a second Mukden, but to the ease with which he scattered death sentences to his subordinates right and left.

The personal intervention of the commander of the Far Eastern Special District, Commander Stern, made it possible to avoid a catastrophe at the front and cancel most of the death sentences signed by Zhukov. Stalin quickly realized that Stern needed to be removed, which was soon done, and Zhukov, on the contrary, appointed the commander of the Kyiv Special Military District, the first in importance, believing to elevate him even more in the very near future.

For the arrival of the People's Commissar, the exercises of the 99th Infantry Division were prepared in conditions as close as possible to real combat training.

Exactly at the appointed time, the artillery roared. The cannonade went on for two hours. Exactly on schedule, bombers appeared over the battlefield, covered by fighters. For a whole hour, replacing each other, three waves of bombers ironed the defense of the "enemy".

The dust raised by the explosions of the last bombs had not yet settled, when the tanks rushed forward, and the infantry followed them like a living wall. The thunder of artillery resounded again, transferring fire into the depths of the "enemy's" defenses. Tanks and infantry followed the barrage, keeping at the minimum possible distance from the explosions of live shells.

The spectacle was impressive. It seemed that the avalanche of tanks and infantry, following the barrage of fire, would no longer stop until the very coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Commissar was pleased. "It's like I've been in a real battle!" Timoshenko said cheerfully, turning to Zhukov. He did not answer, only moved his wide cleft chin and silently pointed to a tall general with an open Russian face - the commander of the 99th division. Here, they say, whom to thank for the presentation. Tymoshenko did not need prompting. He and Zhukov long ago outlined this general in order to make him an exemplary commander, and from his 99th division - an exemplary unit, to which all the armed forces were to be equal. The commander of the 99th Rifle Division was General Vlasov [27].

The echoes of the global maneuvers conducted by the Red Army, unprecedented in their scale, rolled around the world in the roar of explosions of live shells, bombs and mines exploding over a vast territory from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea.

More distinctly than others, the thunder of the "Thunderstorm" approaching from the east was naturally heard in Berlin, where representatives of Italy and Japan began to gather for the upcoming signing of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Triple Alliance. The Italians and Japanese did not fail to find out from Hitler, who met them, how does he feel about such a loud saber-rattling coming from Moscow? The Fuhrer was outwardly calm. Knowing full well that Stalin was preparing his army for the impending landing of German troops in England, the Fuhrer was still nervous, unable to predict Stalin's reaction when he learned that the long-awaited landing was again postponed indefinitely. What if Stalin realizes that he is being fooled, and, not expecting a German invasion of England, will launch an offensive in the Balkans or in Poland? Or here and there at the same time? We must try to suggest another way to Stalin. "I think," Hitler remarked to Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano, "Stalin should be encouraged to move south, to Iran or India, so that he gets access to the Indian Ocean,

which is more important for Russia than its position in the Baltic or the Balkans.

The activity of Soviet intelligence in Iran and Afghanistan had long been noticed by the Germans. It was also noticed that this activity has recently increased dramatically. "That's just what you need!" decided in Berlin. Let him get in there and deal with the British bases in Iraq himself.

But for now, it is necessary to reassure the Kremlin about the forthcoming conclusion of the Triple Alliance.

Ribbentrop telegraphed von Toppelskirch, chargé d'affaires in Moscow (Count Schulenburg was on vacation):

Urgently!

"Berlin, September 25, 1940 No. 1746.

state secret

Top secret

Only for chargé d'affaires in person

Please visit Molotov on Thursday, September 26, and on my behalf inform him that, in view of the cordial relations that exist between Germany and the Soviet Union, I would like to inform him in advance, strictly confidentially, of the following:

1. The warmongering agitation in America, which at the present stage of the final defeat of England sees its last outlet in the extension and continuation of the war, has led to negotiations between the two Axis Powers on the one hand, and Japan on the other; the result of this, presumably within the next few days, will be the signing of a military alliance between the three powers.

2. This alliance, from the very beginning and consistently, is directed exclusively against the American warmongers...

3. The treaty, of course, does not pursue any aggressive aims towards America. Its exclusive purpose is only to bring to life those elements that insist on America's entry into the war ...

4. From the very beginning of these negotiations, the three contracting parties fully agreed that their alliance would in no way affect the relations of each of them with the Soviet Union ...

6. Taking this opportunity, please tell Mr. Molotov ... that I intend to soon send a personal letter to Mr. Stalin, in which ... the German point of view on the current political situation will be frankly and confidentially stated ... In addition, the letter will contain an invitation to Berlin Mr. Molotov, whose return visit, after my two visits to Moscow, is expected by us and with whom I would like to discuss important problems concerning the establishment of common political goals for the future. Ribbentrop".

Received at Moscow on September 26, 1940.

at 12.05

While Berlin was preparing for the signing of the Tripartite Pact, while employees of the German Foreign Ministry were ciphering Ribbentrop's telegram and transmitting it to Moscow, and feverishly deciphering it at the German embassy, air raid sirens were blaring all over Germany - British heavy bombers were more and more confidently biting into German airspace, clearly showing that, despite all ambitions, the air defense of the Reich is very far from perfect.

During September 25 and 26, one of the main bases of the German fleet in Kiel was subjected to particularly powerful air strikes, where, in addition to many other warships, the only two so far German battleships Scharhorst and Gneisenau, as well as located in completion of the aircraft carrier Graf Zeppelin. And although these raids did not cause much damage, the very fact that the British bombed the main base of the Kriegsmarine with impunity did not at all inspire those to whom imperial propaganda buzzed all ears about a defeated and defeated England, the capture of which was only a matter of two or three days of good weather.

On September 27, 1940, the Triple Alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan was signed in Berlin in an atmosphere of "stern and restrained solemnity". The cunning Japanese, who did not at all want to bind themselves to any alliances, insisted on a purely Asian vagueness of the text, which read: "... the contracting parties provide each other with mutual support in case one of the parties is attacked by a state that is not yet involved into the war." Everyone interpreted these words as a warning to the United States, but it was also clear to everyone else that now, in the event of an invasion of Europe, Stalin would have to reckon with the prospect of opening a second front on his eastern borders.

On the eve of the charge d'affaires of Germany in Moscow, as he was ordered, he asked for an appointment with the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Molotov. After some bureaucratic delays, he was received by Molotov at 22.00 Moscow time.

The Commissar was restrainedly friendly. After listening to Ribbentrop's message, he noted with satisfaction the 6th point. Suddenly changing the subject of the conversation, Molotov asked Toppelskirch how to understand the latest German-Finnish agreement, which, according to the Finnish communique, gives German troops the right of passage to Norway through Finland?

Toppelskirch replied that he had no information on this matter, and turned the conversation back to the forthcoming signing of the Triple Alliance. However, we have the right, continues Molotov, not only to be warned about this, but also to get acquainted with all the secret protocols attached to the treaty. This desire of the Soviet government, Molotov explains, is based on Articles 3 and 4 of the non-aggression treaty concluded with Germany. If the Soviet Union misunderstands its rights, then let the German government explain its position on this matter.

But Chargé d'Affaires von Toppelskirch can do nothing but inform Berlin of this desire of the Soviet government. After a short silence, Molotov again returns to the German-Finnish agreement. The public of the world is already discussing this agreement, but the Soviet government knows nothing about it.

Molotov again refers to the Soviet-German treaty, the secret protocols to which clearly refer to spheres of influence. Toppelskirch invariably reminded the people's commissar that he was instructed only to inform the Soviet government about the upcoming signing of the Triple Alliance, and about everything else he immediately informed his

government, because it does not have any information on these issues ...

On September 30, Pravda reported on the signing of the Triple Alliance in Berlin, pretending that this insignificant event did not deserve much attention.

Intelligence reports flowing through General Halder no longer left any doubt that Stalin was preparing an attack on Germany. The only question was timing.

"The amount of information is increasing," the chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff wrote with anxiety in his diary, "that Russia in 1941 is preparing for an armed conflict with us. Russian troops are intensively improving their combat skills. At the same time, great importance is attached to actions in a wooded area. The use of wooded areas in operational and tactical terms sets us new tasks in the field of command and control of troops, their organization and combat training.

Around noon, Halder was summoned to the commander-in-chief of the ground forces, General Brauchitsch, who had just returned from Berlin, bringing a bunch of rumors and gossip and honestly saying that he himself did not really understand anything. "... The OKW is also unable to determine a clear military-strategic line. The tripartite alliance naturally necessitates quite definite political decisions. But the political game is far over and the results cannot be foreseen. Frankly speaking, the Fuhrer is inconsistent, it is difficult to work with him. Now I have the impression that he does not want a conflict with Stalin, but really wants to do away with England, although, as you well know, Franz, all this mess on the English Channel was brewed in order to divert Stalin's attention from the concentration of our troops on the Russian border. Now the Fuhrer sent Stalin a notice of the conclusion of the pact with Japan 24 hours before its signing. Now a new letter is being prepared to Stalin with the aim of getting him interested in the English inheritance and gaining support against England. "If this succeeds," said the Fuhrer, "then I believe that it will be possible to begin decisive action against England." "Against England? I asked. "But, my Fuhrer, after all, it was decided to concentrate forces in an easterly direction ..."

He did not let me finish, jumped up and almost yelled: "Now the most important thing is to achieve a final settlement of relations with France and find out the position of Italy on this issue. I am going to meet with the Duce in the coming days and discuss with him the next steps regarding France! We will never again allow England to use France as her sword on the European continent! Providence chose me precisely for this purpose, to put things in order in our old European house, having cleansed it of Jews and English rule!"

"All right," Halder chuckled, "we are soldiers and must do our job. At least for the time being, it has been possible to deploy enough forces in Rumania without much hindrance. And, apparently, Stalin aimed his main blow precisely there.

Stalin, although he considered Hitler a good fellow, but in his heart despised him, mainly because of his theoretical incompetence, which led to outright plagiarism.

I remember that back in the old days, in 1918, Lenin officially introduced the "party maximum", above which no one could receive, while declaring that no one would earn more than working wages. At the same time, all the newspapers wrote about the modesty of Ilyich's life, who abandoned the luxurious Kremlin chambers and settled in two small rooms, one of which was his study, which actually consisted of a desk littered with books and papers.

For those who have not yet lost the ability to think, these cheap gestures did not cause anything but laughter, because. it was well known that in those years it was impossible to buy absolutely anything with Soviet money. A whole network of special distributors was already being created and strengthened, the postscript to which depended only on the position in the party hierarchy. Nevertheless, Hitler did not hesitate to copy all this props one by one.

Having come to power and settling in the residence of the Reich Chancellor, he defiantly ordered all private premises to be closed, leaving himself two small rooms. All German newspapers circulated photographs of these rooms: one showed the Fuhrer's bedroom - an iron bed, a skinny wardrobe, a small table; on the second - his office: a few ordinary chairs and a desk littered with papers and books.

Back in January 1933, Hitler officially renounced the chancellor's salary, declaring that no salary in the Reich would exceed a thousand marks.

Neither then - in Petrograd, nor later - in Berlin, no one could understand that for the top of the new type of party state invented by Lenin, salaries were not needed at all, since all the material values of the country, up to and including bread rations, are concentrated in the hands of this very top.

Lenin brilliantly thought it all out, and Hitler licked it. It's just disgusting to watch! Passing pennants at factories, labor shock workers, people's courts - well, wherever you look, everything has been torn off from us. Even the Gestapo. Although, to be honest, they are far from us. During the so-called "Night of the Long Knives", when the Fuhrer got rid of the veterans of his own party who had bothered him, no more than 500 people were shot or killed in another way. Laughter! And so, under the late Yezhov, some communists were arrested, shot and turned into camp dust - one million two hundred and twenty thousand nine hundred and thirty-four people. These are only communists, and it was impossible to take into account non-party people at all. And this is in just two years! Learn, Adolf, how to do big politics.

Of course, in order to self-criticism, it should be said that not everything is good with us either. The class struggle is not only subsiding, but, on the contrary, everything is intensifying. And here the opinion of the comrades was divided. So much so that the discussions began to take place in a very sharp manner, as it should be - in the Bolshevik way. Zhdanov and Molotov, for example, believe that scientists will think better and faster if institutes and various scientific centers there are turned into special prisons, and they themselves into prisoners, well, and families, of course, into hostages. Complete the task - we'll give a date, if you don't complete it - we'll plant the family. It must be said that the experiments gave very positive results.

Recall at least Ramzin, Polikarpov or, say, Tupolev. All his new bomber did not stick in any way, but then things started right away. But Beria and Malenkov believe that families should definitely be planted together with scientists. This will increase labor productivity, especially if every day they meet their wife and children on a walk, even in a neighboring courtyard through a wire. Of course, in their own way, all comrades are right, and there is no reason for them to quarrel over this. Let's figure it out - and then we'll try, and we'll try this. Let's calculate the economic effect. We'll see. It's a family matter, as they say...

But what do we end up with? Is Hitler going to land in England or not? General Golikov is firmly convinced that yes. Although there will apparently be no "landing weather" this year, the landing will certainly take place in the spring and summer of next year.

Our reconnaissance continues to record an increase in the flow of echelons towards the English Channel coast. As for the situation on our borders, that is, there is information about the demobilization of several divisions in Poland in order to return at least 300-400 thousand people to the sphere of industrial and civilian production.

But even this is not the most important thing, Comrade Stalin. The psychological mood of the British has changed. I mean, of course, not ordinary people, but military and government circles. If in August and September these circles were very belligerent, predicting the inevitable defeat of the Germans in the event of a landing in England, now the possibility of the success of this enterprise of Hitler is not ruled out. Apparently, the upcoming completion of the German battleships and the promised intensification of the actions of the Italian fleet give rise to doubts among the British whether their own fleet will be able to disrupt the landing, being tied up by fierce battles in other areas.

Stalin sighs. Of the four new battleships of the "Soviet Union" type being built in the USSR, one had to be abandoned.

It was today, October 2, 1940, that Stalin ordered to suspend the construction of the battleship Sovetskaya Belorussia in Molotovsk, which should later be included in the official decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks "On the military shipbuilding plan for 1941", which is being redone for the third time. It is hard for Stalin to part with heavy ships. Not enough metal. Almost all stock metal is consumed by the tank and artillery program. Army applications for tanks and artillery are simply incredible. But here Meretskov and Timoshenko held firm: without (at least) triple superiority in tanks, aircraft and artillery, they cannot guarantee the success of Operation Thunderstorm.

If you think about it, it's even a good thing that the Germans will not land this year. We better prepare and gather such an army that no one will stop us. The fact that the British turned sour is bad. We need to support them a little so that they understand that we are not so against them, and so that the Germans think that we are not completely with them, although, of course, we are not against ...

On October 5, about a month after the start of the bombing of London, the Pravda newspaper published an article by TASS correspondent Andrei Rotshtein with a very strange headline: "TASS correspondent visits one of the anti-aircraft batteries in the London area."

Noting that "the air defense was much more impressive than the Luftwaffe had hoped for", and briefly describing the nightly actions of the anti-aircraft gunners, the correspondent then fell into the already perfect lyrics:

"In the morning I managed to get to know twenty soldiers who served on this anti-aircraft battery. Most of them were young workers aged 23-24: recent miners, drivers, railroad workers, printers, mechanics. Only a small number were former employees and laborers. Ten soldiers turned out to be members of the "trade union", among them two miners. They only last a few weeks on a battery. Their diet is quite satisfactory. The cook - a corporal - a former miner - comes from the same village as the communist leader of the South Wales Miners' Federation, Jack Horner. The correspondent concluded his publication by pointing out that there are "dozens of such batteries" in the London area, where the spirit of "camaraderie and patriotism" reigns.

Those who knew how to read the Soviet press, and there were quite a few of them both in the USSR and abroad, sensed a sensation in this correspondence. Not once since the beginning of the war has anything like this appeared in the Soviet press either about the Germans, or the Poles, or the French. The article explicitly hinted that England was waging a "people's war" in which the main role, as always and everywhere, was played by the "proletariat". And allusions to Jack Horner's countrymen made it clear to readers that the soldiers were not just "proletarians", but, quite possibly, communists.

Meanwhile, the air offensive against England continued, albeit at a slower pace. The British noted that every day fewer enemy aircraft appeared in their airspace. But still there were enough of them to keep the air defense service and the population in suspense.

On October 5, a half-ton bomb exploded in the square near the ancient building of the English Parliament. The huge, stained-glass window of the "mother of all parliaments" had been blown out, turning from a unique work of art into a huge, ugly hole. Fragments of an air bomb hit the bronze equestrian statue of King Richard the Lionheart, which stood in the square in front of the Parliament building. The sword in the legendary knight king's hand was bent but not broken, which everyone considered a good omen...

Another German bomb, breaking through the dome of the beautiful Cathedral of St. Paul, exploded, damaging and throwing debris at the precious altar of the 15th century. All this was very impressive, but every day it cost more and more. The Germans admitted that in September they lost 582 aircraft over England. The British claimed that during the past month they had destroyed 1,088 enemy planes. Dominance in the air was never won, and there was nothing to say about dominance at sea.

Cherbourg, where Hitler planned to relocate all the combat-ready ships of his fleet, was subjected to daily attacks from the sea and air. And in the Mediterranean, the Italian fleet continued shamefully hiding in bases, completely giving the sea to the British. Caravans of English transports supplied Wywell's army in Egypt almost without any interference, carried weapons to Malta, went with cargo through the Suez Canal to India and the Far East and back to the mother country. The admirals blatantly sabotaged Mussolini's direct orders. They knew better than the dreamer-Duce the combat capability of the formations entrusted to them.

On October 12, the English cruiser Ajax, already famous for participating in the destruction of the "pocket" battleship Admiral Spee, intercepted two Italian destroyers off the very coast of Sicily and immediately drowned them. Ajax had not yet managed to cover the base, as the Italian crews began to leave their ships in a panic. The next day, the same Ajax intercepted a whole formation of Italian ships, consisting of a heavy cruiser and four destroyers. Ajax, a light cruiser, opened fire on the Italian formation without hesitation, covering the destroyer Artigliere with the very first salvo. The Italians, under the cover of a smokescreen, took to their heels. Having called the cruiser "York" on the radio for help, "Ajax" rushed in pursuit, but the coming night hid the enemy from him. With the first rays of the sun, the British saw that the lined "Artigliere" hobbled in tow after another Italian destroyer. Seeing the English ships, the destroyer that was taking the Artigliere away immediately gave up the tug and began to leave. A signal was raised on the mast of the Ajax, inviting the crew of the destroyer to leave the ship, which was immediately carried out. A few volleys from the Ajax's stern turret, and the Italian destroyer disappeared forever in a fiery whirlwind of detonated torpedoes.

The newsreel of this event, filmed by the British, was played very quickly in Hitler's personal cinema. They scrolled, not without a second thought, so that the Fuhrer was careful not to transfer the fleet to Cherbourg, where it would be under the noses of the British. Maybe it makes sense to appoint a German admiral to command the Italian fleet? The "Last of the Romans" assured the Fuhrer that in October the English fleet would be swept out of the Mediterranean. Apparently this is again empty words. The huge Italian fleet - 6 battleships, 8 heavy and 25 light cruisers - is paralyzed by fear of the red cross of St. George and his centuries-old authority. And their own, the German fleet is not much better. Where to find good admirals who did not participate in the first world war?

At a recent meeting, Admiral Raeder stated that at present the surface ships of the German fleet are not in a position to act effectively against the British until the materiel is put in order and the losses incurred in the Norwegian operation are replenished. The Führer reminded Raeder that he had only received a reprieve until the spring of 1941, when he would have to somehow secure the invasion of England. But then Bismarck and Tirpitz will already be in service. Yes, the Führer agrees, but does Raeder know that the flow of military supplies from the US to England follows the Atlantic almost unguarded?

Yes, my Fuhrer, replies the grand admiral, we know this, and our few submarines are doing what they can, suffering heavy losses. For 10 months of 1940, 22 boats were lost. Of course, they will suffer losses, Hitler yells, if the surface fleet does not support them at all. Bases of the Atlantic coast of France are at your disposal. Move the fleet there, and immediately! Cherbourg, Brest, what else is there?!

But this means, my Fuhrer, exposing the ships to the constant attacks of British aviation, which has not yet been destroyed, as Reichsmarschall Goering promised us all.

Hitler jumps up. If the fleet does not want to fight, it will order the ships to be disarmed, and from the crews it will form two army corps, which the late Hindenburg dreamed of. Let the surface ships die to one and all, but they fight.

More than anything, Hitler loves triumphal arches. A failed architect, no doubt a talented graphic artist, he does not want to put up with this and is ready to sit for hours with his favorite, the life architect Albert Speer, and draw triumphal arches of various shapes and styles on sheets of drawing paper. He dreams of installing at least five triumphal arches in every city of the "thousand-year Reich" in honor of all past, present and future victories of German weapons. His dreams go further: he is preparing a plan for the overhaul of all cities in Germany. This plan provides for the almost complete demolition of all major cities in the country, starting with Berlin and Munich, which irritate the Fuhrer with their gothic mournfulness and petty-bourgeois pretentiousness.

In Speer's practical head, the figures of the cost of at least a partial implementation of the Fuhrer's plan flicker. The figure is so huge that even the demolition of old houses in the foreseeable future will not get money.

The young architect does not share Hitler's creative plans in everything, but respectfully keeps silent, allowing himself only to discreetly admire the graphic abilities of the Reich Chancellor of Germany. Hitler is happy. His high spirits are fueled by reports from various sources about the growing panic in England. The evacuation of the royal family and government to Canada is being prepared. It seems that the fighting spirit of the British was preserved only in the fleet and in aviation. To all appearances, it is over with England, and legally we will complete it next spring, calmly occupying this ill-fated island.

General Halder has been working with the Fuhrer for so long that he is not surprised at anything. He cautiously reminds Hitler of Operations Highfish and Harpoon, and also that in the bowels of the General Staff the final work is underway to strike in an easterly direction, i.e. across the Soviet Union. Hitler is silent for several minutes, carefully examining the triumphal arch on a piece of drawing paper. "This is exactly what I will order to be installed in London!" - the Fuhrer utters and releases Speer with a wave of his hand.

Everything is going according to plan, the colonel-general reports dryly. The demobilization plan was conceived together by Hitler, Halder and Brauchitsch. It has already been planted to Soviet intelligence, and will soon be announced in the press as proof of Germany's peaceful intentions. This will openly drive trains to the East, ostensibly for the export of the demobilized. And in their place

bring in two new soldiers, thereby doubling the number of troops in Poland and East Prussia. Let the Stalinist intelligence deal with this as it wants, and we will say that mass demobilization is underway and only a partial replenishment of it with recruits.

Leaning back comfortably in his chair, arms folded across his chest, Hitler looks dreamily at the Chief of the General Staff. All this is good, or maybe we should really try to occupy England before the eastern campaign?

Halder shakes his head doubtfully. There are no objective data, my Fuhrer, for this. On the contrary, we have information that the grouping of British troops in the south of the country is gaining strength every day. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that as soon as we begin the landing, Stalin will immediately throw his army forward, striking from the Belostok balcony on Berlin, at the same time cutting us off from Romanian oil and acquiring England as an ally. In other words, receiving the World Ocean, which we ourselves, alas, do not own.

Taking advantage of the moment, the United States will enter the war, and the situation may become critical. And if you manage to agree with Stalin? Reach an agreement? About what? For example, it will be possible to convince him to join the Axis countries on the terms of the division of the former British Empire. So that he abandoned his ambitious plans in Europe, primarily in the Balkans, and turned south towards Iran and Afghanistan, towards the non-freezing Persian Gulf with its oil wealth.

Halder disagrees: we cannot long endure the concentration of such a huge army on our eastern frontiers. It is necessary to destroy Stalin's military machine in the very near future, without delaying further than until May of next year. This is the opinion of the entire command of the land army.

To destroy, grumbles Hitler, is easy to destroy. But to make this machine work for us, gradually destroying the Bolshevik ideology, is more difficult. This is already an area in which Halder understands nothing. It is easy for him - he is a military man, he is out of politics. Hitler is much more difficult. Party intrigues tormented him. He already can hardly stand his deputy in the party, Rudolf Hess, despite the fact that they swore eternal friendship even when they were in prison together, where Hitler dictated to Hess his immortal book *Mein Kampf*.

Born in Alexandria and raised among the English, Hess considers the war with England a tragedy for the white nation. He always itches to Hitler that it is necessary to reach an agreement with the British as soon as possible, ensuring the inviolability of their precious empire by renouncing hegemony in Europe, and to turn all the forces of Germany and all civilized mankind to the destruction of the Bolshevik infection. This plague of the 20th century!

But Bormann thinks differently. He gently hints that Hess should generally be removed from the leadership of the party, since he does not understand anything in the complex and scrupulous party work, and made head of the Hitler Youth, which is more suitable for his temperament. From Bormann's point of view, there is no "white nation" at all, but only the "German nation", to which the British, being more French by roots, have a very distant relationship. The concept of "Germanic peoples" is anti-scientific and probably invented by the Jews. The age-old and frightened tangle of European contradictions, according to Bormann, cannot be resolved without the destruction of England - this centuries-old stronghold of world Jewry. As for Russia, it is ideologically so close to us today that one can predict the gradual merging of National Socialism with National Bolshevism and the creation on this basis of a world National Socialist empire. Approximately the same views are held by Ribbentrop, who never managed to

get out of the euphoria of their Kremlin meetings. He believes that Stalin is a most reliable friend and ally, just like us, exhausted by British intrigues and dreaming when this last stronghold of international imperialism will finally collapse. I want to tell him: idiot, look at the map! Can't you see that your friend has already aimed the crowbar at the back of our heads and is just waiting for us to climb into England. Göring, as it were, hovers over the battle with his Luftwaffe, pretending that he does not care at all who to beat. As the Führer commands.

Goebbels - this fiery speaker, capable of rousing the masses to any feat, clever and erudite, considers the current friendship with Stalin simply immoral. This is nonsense, he argues, that there is anything in common between our teachings, for National Socialism is free socialism, the goal of which is the prosperity and secure future of the German people, and ultimately of all other peoples capable of proving their right to biological existence. Our main goal, our first priority, therefore, is the speedy destruction of Bolshevism as an ideology. Besides, didn't you, Führer, write that the main living space of the future German nation lies in the east, on the lands that, due to a historical misunderstanding, are called Russia?

Himmler - "good old, black Heinrich" - a true friend who shielded Hitler from the bullet of a vile killer with his body, the Reichsführer SS, head of the most powerful punitive intelligence apparatus, has his own point of view. He believes that the matter is not only and not so much in Bolshevism, but in the racial infringement of the Slavs. Russia has always been a Bolshevik country, only hiding behind a different terminology. Therefore, we should not talk about the destruction of ideology, but about the destruction of the Slavic race, which has proved throughout its history that it has no right to exist.

All this is wonderful. Dreaminess and romanticism are characteristic of the old parteigenossen. It's nice to listen to them, seeing in their reasoning echoes of their own ideas. Alas, it is much more difficult with the military. Everything is concrete with them: the capacity of railways, the patency of highways, the creation of a network of airfields and warehouses, the masking of planned measures, but the main thing is to coordinate the goals of the political leadership of Germany with the real capabilities of the armed forces.

But the reality is that if Stalin started military operations now, we in the East have no real forces that could be opposed to his gigantic military machine. But you and I, dear Halder, know that he won't start until we're stuck in the Sea Lion.

Hitler's thin lips curve into a smile. We know about it, the Colonel-General agrees, but does Stalin know about it? Let's hope that his intelligence does not hide the information received from their leader. In the meantime, General, continue with the old plan, subject to the directive you were to receive from the OKW this morning. Halder nods. He had already familiarized himself with the latest directive signed by Keitel on behalf of the Führer:

Führer HQ

October 12, 1940

"Top secret!"

The Führer has decided that from today until spring, preparations for Operation Sea Lion should continue solely for the purpose of exerting political and military pressure on England. If an invasion is deemed expedient in the spring or early summer of 1941, orders to resume operational readiness will be given at the appropriate time ... "

The chief of the general staff did not know that it was at this very moment that a letter signed by Ribbentrop was sent from Berlin to Stalin, which said:

"Berlin. October 13, 1940

Dear Mr. Stalin!

More than a year ago, according to your and the Fuhrer's decision, relations between Germany and Soviet Russia were revised and put on an absolutely new basis ...

Therefore, today I would like to make a cursory review of the events that have taken place since my last visit to Moscow. In connection with the historical importance of these events, and in continuation of our exchange of views that took place in the last year, I would like to review for you the policy pursued by Germany during this period.

After the end of the Polish campaign, we noticed (and this was confirmed by numerous reports received during the winter) that England, true to its traditional policy, builds its entire military strategy with the expectation of expanding the war ...

Since that time, British policy has entered a period of active expansion of the war to other peoples of Europe. After the end of the Soviet-Finnish war, Norway was chosen as the first target ... Only thanks to the timely intervention of the German leadership and the lightning strikes of our troops, which drove the British and French out of Norway, the entire Scandinavia did not become a theater of military operations ...

The next target of the British policy of expanding the war was the Balkans. In accordance with the information that has come down to us, a variety of aggressive plans were hatched for this year, and in one case an order was already given for their execution ...

Realizing the complete absurdity of continuing this war, the Fuhrer again offered peace to England on July 19. Now, after the rejection of this last proposal, Germany intends to wage war against England and her empire until the final defeat of Britain ...

After taking measures to protect the position of the Axis in Europe, the main interest of the imperial government and the Italian government has been focused in the last few weeks on preventing the spread of hostilities outside Europe and turning them into a world fire.

Since the hopes of the British to find allies in Europe have faded, the British government has stepped up support for those circles of overseas democracies that are striving to enter the war against Germany and Italy on the side of England ...

The exchange of opinion which soon followed brought Berlin, Rome and Tokyo to complete unanimity in the sense that, in the interests of the speedy restoration of peace, any further expansion of the war must be prevented, and that the best means of counteracting the international cabal of warmongers would be a military alliance of the Three Powers.

As regards the question of the position of the three participants in this Union with regard to Soviet Russia, I would like to say at once that from the very beginning of the exchange of opinions, all the Three Powers were equally of the opinion that this pact was in no way directed against the Soviet Union, that, on the contrary, the friendly relations of the Three Powers and their treaties with

Under no circumstances should the USSR be affected by this agreement...

As you remember, during my first visit to Moscow, I quite frankly discussed similar ideas with you ...

In conclusion, I would like to state, in full accordance with the opinion of the Fuehrer,

that the historical task of the FOUR POWERS is to harmonize their long-term political goals and, by delimiting their spheres of interests on a world scale, direct the future of their peoples along the right path.

After my two visits to Moscow, I personally would be especially pleased to see Herr Molotov in Berlin. His visit, moreover, will give the Führer the opportunity to express personally to Herr Molotov his views on the future character of relations between our peoples. Upon his return, Mr. Molotov will be able to give you a detailed account of the goals and intentions of the Fuhrer ...

With best regards, yours truly

Ribbentrop".

The letter sent through Schulenburg was to be delivered personally to Stalin no later than October 17th. There were good reasons for this. Despite the composure of the Wehrmacht command, which believed that Stalin would not take any active action before the start of Operation Sea Lion, data was received through the channels of Heydrich, whose information almost always differed from that of Admiral Canaris, which plunged Hitler and his inner circle into a state of panic .

Information received from a source close to the leadership of the Red Army Air Force said that, expecting an invasion of England in the twentieth of September, Stalin gave a secret directive to the troops to launch an offensive along the entire border line from the Barents to the Black Sea on October 22. The directive stated that final orders would be given no later than October 19, and in the absence of such, "troops to act in accordance with existing orders and instructions."

The facts showed that the Red Army was at the peak of its operational readiness.

The maneuvers of the Kyiv Special Military District, unprecedented in scale, have just ended. No less large-scale maneuvers of the Belarusian Military District, commanded by one of the most experienced Soviet tank strategists, General Pavlov, are still ongoing. The maneuvers are controlled by the Chief of the Operations Department of the General Staff, General Vatutin. The exercises are also continuing in the huge Leningrad military district, where, according to the latest information, Timoshenko went. The district is set in motion and again clearly aimed at Finland. Offensive techniques are being practiced in all districts. Breakthrough of the enemy's defenses, followed by the rapid exit of large masses of tanks and cavalry into the operational space.

Judging by the concentration of units involved, as well as by the attention that the Minister of War (People's Commissar) personally pays to the exercises, Stalin aimed the main blow at the Balkans and Finland.

On the border with the General Government (Poland), where the construction of fortifications is underway, apparently, the Kremlin wants to limit itself, at least at the first stage, to defensive-deterrent actions if the movement to the Balkans leads to an armed clash with us. However, the presence of forces and means on the Bialystok balcony

with equal probability assumes the possibility of a massive offensive in this sector as well.

In any case, Stalin's dissatisfaction is obvious, and the October 5 Pravda article about one of London's anti-aircraft batteries, if not a turn in the Kremlin's foreign policy, should be understood as a hint at the existing possibility of achieving an alliance with England.

One way or another, Stalin must be quickly drawn into negotiations at the highest possible level in order to find out his official intentions and try to ferret out the true goals ...

But how to draw Stalin into negotiations? The Soviet embassy in Berlin is virtually inactive. Employees of the German Foreign Ministry did not find a single person there who would be authorized to talk to them about anything, and even more so to receive dispatches addressed to Stalin.

Having tested the ground and realizing that it was impossible to break through to Stalin, the German ambassador on October 17 gave a letter to Molotov, about which he informed his boss in Berlin by telegram dated October 18. Ribbentrop went into hysterics. Hitler and he were sure that they had fallen into a diplomatic trap. Stalin did not receive Schulenburg so as not to receive the letter, or at least not to receive it in time.

Molotov will hide the letter altogether, or hand it over to Stalin when it loses all meaning. This means that in the coming days we should expect all sorts of surprises.

In vain, Schulenburg calmed his panicked leaders by telegraphing from Moscow: "I handed the letter intended to Stalin to Molotov, since Molotov is Stalin's closest confidant, and in the future we will have to deal with him on all major political issues ..."

Schulenburg's response in Berlin was considered unconvincing, and his references to the fact that the letter at the embassy could not be translated into Russian in time, which caused a delay until October 17, were simply ridiculous. The tension grew. In the Wehrmacht, increased combat readiness was introduced ...

Chapter 7

Stalin and Molotov carefully studied Ribbentrop's voluminous message. There was no doubt. A small Stalinist "demarchik" with a London anti-aircraft battery did not go unnoticed in Berlin. The entire letter from the German Foreign Minister is riddled with anxiety about possible turns in Anglo-Soviet relations. There was also a reminder that England was actually already defeated and would soon be occupied. This is a resolved issue. When doesn't matter. When will be the time to deal with such trifles.

And yet there is some uncertainty in the letter about England. Apparently, the desire to somehow justify the postponement of the invasion to next year. This opens up a lot of room for maneuver in order to induce the Germans to throw all the forces of their army, air force and navy against the perfidious and already defeated England.

Therefore, the issue with Finland is very delicate. On the one hand, the Germans

of course, it is convenient to build up our forces in Norway for the upcoming invasion through the territory of this country. But Soviet intelligence categorically declares that German troops do not appear in Norway, but dissolve in the Finnish forests.

Under the guise of railway conductors, intelligence specialists from the GRU, having traveled all over Finland far and wide, established that German troops were concentrated in the northern part of Finland and that there were already at least 35,000 of them. What this all means needs to be clarified, since here the Germans are clearly violating the agreement on the division of spheres of influence. We need to make it very clear to them that we do not intend to tolerate the existence of Finland as an independent state any longer, to which we have every legal right.

The point is not only in agreements with Germany, but in the fact that Finland is nothing more than a province of Russia, lost in 1918 under pressure from the same Germans. We just want to get back what is ours and, if necessary, by force! Is it unfair?

The shame of the winter war continues to oppress Stalin. Especially this fear when it became obvious that England would intervene in the war. But all he could afford was to put the wife and son of "comrade" Kuusinen in the camp, promising to release them when the father of the family ratifies the Soviet-Finnish treaty in Helsinki.

Then there are the problems of the Balkans. First of all, Romania and Bulgaria, where the interests of the Soviet Union are quite obvious. German troops are already pouring into Romania and Italian troops are expected. The Germans simply lied on this issue. At first they talked about the intrigues of British intelligence, trying to destabilize the entire Balkan region, draw Romania into the war and seize the sources of Romanian oil. Then, on October 9, a spokesman for the German Foreign Ministry said at a press conference that the rumors about the sending of German troops to Romania were, so to speak, absurd. The representative emphasized that only German officers-instructors for the Romanian army and exemplary German units with training purposes were sent to Romania.

In Bulgaria, some incomprehensible negotiations are underway with the Germans. Judging by the very scarce information, Hitler is pulling Bulgaria into the Axis. Intelligence reports that at one of the meetings of the secret State Council, the Bulgarian Tsar Boris exclaimed in despair: "My God, my God! What do we do? From the West - Hitler, from the East - Stalin! Where are we to go? Perhaps it's better to go to Hitler than to the Bolsheviks!"

The message stipulated that the opinion of the king did not at all coincide with the opinion of many members of the government. Stalin immediately came up with the idea to eliminate Tsar Boris, based on his favorite principle: "There is a person - there is a problem. No person, no problem."

But the most interesting information comes from Germany itself. Having failed to invade England before the start of the autumn season, Hitler wants to use the time until next summer to finally sweep the British out of the Mediterranean. With the simultaneous capture of the Suez Canal by the Italians, it is planned to capture Gibraltar either by the Germans, passed through Spanish territory, or by the Germans and the Spaniards together, if it is possible to negotiate with Franco. The Italian fleet is preparing to sharply increase activity and is only waiting for the commissioning of several new ships, including two more battleships, surpassing everything that the British have in their operational and tactical data. In addition, a plan was developed for a sharp intensification of the actions of the German fleet on British communications. But most interestingly, there is evidence that Hitler, irritated by the slowness of the Italians in Egypt, is preparing an expeditionary force for operations in North Africa. It's really good!

Thus, it makes sense not to take any action for the time being, but to wait for the landing of the main forces of the Wehrmacht in England and then launch a broad offensive in Europe. For now

it is better to prepare the army, play appropriate games at all levels and try to improve their strategic positions in the north (Finland) and in the south (Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey) even before the start of the Thunderstorm through negotiations and diplomatic pressure. Temporarily refuse the English inheritance offered to us, and categorically not refuse the offer to join the Axis as a fourth power, determine exact conditions for ourselves and, of course, not take on any military obligations.

With this, let Molotov go to Berlin and better reconnoiter the situation there ...

On October 22, 1940, at 7:35 am, Stalin's long-awaited reply was telegraphed to Berlin through the German embassy in Moscow. With the original letter, Hilger, an adviser to the embassy, urgently flew to Berlin.

"Dear Herr Ribbentrop! I got your letter. I sincerely thank you for your trust, as well as for the valuable analysis of recent events contained in your letter.

I agree with you that, of course, further improvement of relations between our countries is possible only on a solid basis of delineation of long-term mutual interests.

Herr Molotov agrees that he is obliged to repay you with a return visit to Berlin. So he accepts your invitation.

It remains for us to agree on the date of his arrival in Berlin. For Mr. Molotov, the most convenient time is from 10 to 12 November. If this also suits the German government, the issue can be considered resolved ...

As for the discussion of a number of problems jointly with Japan and Italy, then, in principle, without objecting to this idea, I believe that this issue will have to be subjected to preliminary consideration.

With perfect respect, devoted to you

Stalin."

Hitler and Ribbentrop read Stalin's answer on the Fuhrer's special train, which carried Hitler and his entourage to the small Spanish border town of Hendaye to meet with the Spanish dictator Franco.

Franco, who owed his triumph in the civil war to the huge military supplies of Germany and Italy, after the defeat of France, he himself began to ask for participation in the war, hoping to round off his African colonial possessions at the expense of the French. Like all other dictators, Franco had an insatiable appetite for booty, especially if it came cheap.

It was in order to remind Franco of his desire to enter the war that Hitler arrived on October 23 at the Franco-Spanish border. Hitler wanted, as Stalin was rightly warned by intelligence, to have Franco take over the capture of Gibraltar. However, from the moment when Franco was eager to enter the war on the side of Germany, enough time had passed for the caudillo to manage to suppress his first emotional outburst. The landing in England never took place, and Hitler's words that England was "completely defeated" did not produce a cunning

big impression Spaniard. Spanish intelligence quite accurately determined that the defeat of England is still very far away, and if we consider that behind the British back the powerful silhouette of the United States is becoming more and more clearly looming, then no matter how the opposite happens. So it's best not to get involved.

Loved directness and honesty with the allies, Hitler declared that he wanted Spain to enter the war in January 1941 and attack Gibraltar on January 10, promising to send major specialists in the destruction of forts from the air. Franco replied that the Spanish army was not able to prepare for war so quickly, but if it came to war, then he did not need any specialists from Germany - he could handle it himself. At the same time, he proudly lifted his chin, making it clear that the Fuhrer's proposal offended him. For nine hours, with a break for lunch, the conversation between the Fuhrer and the caudillo continued. The bird's voice of the Spaniard and the increasingly irritated voice of Hitler sounded monotone. Nothing concrete could be reached. As a result, the Fuhrer jumped up, slammed the door and locked himself in his sleeping compartment. "Let them knock out four of my teeth," he said angrily to Ribbentrop the next morning, "if I agree to negotiate with him again."

"An ungrateful coward," Ribbentrop echoed to his boss. "He owes us everything, and when his help was needed ..."

Meanwhile, the Fuhrer's train was heading from the Franco-Spanish border to the French town of Montoir, where Hitler was to meet with the head of the Vichy government, Marshal Pétain. The aged hero of Verdun, once the idol of France, and now the culprit of her unprecedented disgrace, of course, could not behave with Hitler with such impudence as Franco. An agreement was quickly reached stating that "the Axis Powers and France have identical interests in the more rapid defeat of England. The French Government, to the best of its ability, undertakes to support all the activities of the Axis Powers to achieve this goal.

It would seem that they managed to agree quickly, but the Fuhrer was gloomy. In his heart of hearts, he expected France to take a more active part in the war, but he realized that this would not be achieved. All the way to Munich, Hitler spent in melancholy and depression, not knowing that the main surprise awaited him ahead and that this surprise was prepared for him by Mussolini's "cordial" friend, with whom the Fuhrer agreed to meet in Florence on October 28 in order to once again encourage the Duce to more actively lead themselves in Africa and the Mediterranean.

During their last meeting at the Brenner Pass on October 4, the Fuhrer said nothing to Mussolini about the fact that German troops were sent to Romania, which Italy also looked with lust. Upon learning of this a few days later, the Duce was furious.

"Hitler always confronts me with *fait accompli*," he complained to his son-in-law and Foreign Minister, Count Ciano. - He did not inform me about the occupation of Norway, nor about the offensive in the West. He acted as if we didn't exist. Now I will repay him with the same coin. He learns from the newspapers that I have occupied Greece. Thus, justice will be restored."

Knowing about the frenzied ambitions of his ally in the Balkans, Hitler warned him several times against any adventures in Greece or Yugoslavia, advising him to deal with England. But England was clearly too tough for Mussolini, the brilliant victories won by Hitler caused burning envy, and the eternal reproaches from the senior patron - a vile feeling of inferiority. The behavior of Greece, which officially declared its neutrality in the war, was, of course, very ambiguous. English warships freely used not only Greek territorial waters, but also bases. English planes landed and refueled at Greek airfields. The Greek prime minister, General Metaxas, openly leaned in favor of England. Greek

intelligence inspired unrest in Italian-occupied Albania, not recognizing any Italian rights to this country. Numerous Italian protests went unheeded.

Thus, Mussolini had a moral justification for the attack on Greece. However, fearful of Hitler's reaction and his possible "order" to stop, Mussolini wrote a letter to the Fuhrer on October 22, where he spoke indistinctly and vaguely about Greek provocations, which he no longer intends to tolerate. Hitler and Ribbentrop received this letter on the train on their way back to Germany.

Suspecting something was wrong, Hitler at the very first station ordered Ribbentrop to contact Ciano and arrange a meeting with Mussolini. When, on the morning of October 28, Hitler got off the train on the platform of the Florence station, he saw Mussolini, who stood with his chin proudly raised and his eyes sparkling.

"The Fuhrer," the Duce announced, "we are on the march! The victorious Italian troops crossed the Greco-Albanian border today at dawn!"

If Mussolini's goal of the war that had begun was the desire to enjoy Hitler's confusion, then he achieved his goal and could congratulate himself on this. Hitler literally dropped his jaw. After all, just three weeks ago, during their last meeting, Mussolini gave his word to the Fuhrer not to do anything in the Balkans, but to concentrate all his efforts in Egypt in order to throw back three times the smaller British aviation behind the Suez Canal and clear the Mediterranean from the British. Instead, the Duce provided the British with an excellent springboard for a possible offensive in the Balkans, threatening to completely destabilize this entire explosive region, where at least some semblance of balance was maintained with great difficulty.

In the German General Staff, Halder's officers shrugged their shoulders in bewilderment. Now, in addition to Gibraltar and Malta, expect the appearance of an English base on about. Crete, as the British could only dream of. However, the British had not yet had time to properly respond to such an unexpected gift presented by Mussolini, as the Greeks stopped the Italian offensive on their own and drove the "victorious" army of the Duce back to Albania. Only the difficult mountainous terrain saved the Italians from encirclement and complete defeat.

On November 4, Hitler called a meeting at the Imperial Chancellery in Berlin, which was attended by Brauchitsch and Halder from the army, and Keitel and Jodl from the OKB. The situation in the Mediterranean after the Italian attack on Greece was analyzed.

The Führer began with the situation in Egypt, bluntly stating that he did not believe in any ability of the Italian military leadership. Beginning in September, Marshal Graziani's army, three times the size of the British, advanced 60 miles and stopped. Before Christmas, the resumption of the Italian offensive should not be expected. Consideration should be given to sending a formation of dive bombers to aid the Italians in attacking the British fleet in Alexandria and mining the Suez Canal. As regards the attack on Greece, Hitler confessed to the silently listening generals, this was certainly blatant stupidity, which, unfortunately, would increase the threat to the German position in the Balkans. The British, who have already landed on Crete and Lemnos without any interference from the Italians, are acquiring air bases from which it is easy to reach the oil fields of Romania, and by concentrating troops in Greece itself, they will be able to capture or win over a number of Balkan countries, which will make the position of Germany simply unbearable. Therefore, Germany can no longer ignore such a danger. To neutralize it, the army must immediately prepare a plan for the invasion of Greece through the territory of Bulgaria. The forces required for this - at least ten divisions - begin

concentrate in Romania.

"All this must be done quickly," Hitler breaks out, "and hope that Russia remains neutral."

Brauchitsch and Halder look at each other. Going to meetings with the Fuhrer, the commander-in-chief and the chief of staff of the ground forces intended to report to Hitler on the state of development of the plan of attack on the USSR, the last details of which were worked out by Paulus. During the past month, Hitler has been avoiding the conversation about the war with the USSR in every possible way: either quickly transferring it to another topic, or emphasizing that at present the most important thing is to finally crush England. Apparently, the Fuhrer himself was already confused in his game, forgetting that he had given very clear instructions to use all the activities of Operation Sea Lion to mislead Stalin.

But now things are getting confusing. More and more forces and means are rushing to fight England, which has sharply stepped up its actions, clearly exceeding the reasonable level of a purely camouflage operation, whose boundaries were clearly defined by the Highfish and Harpoon plans. The flow of military equipment pouring into England from the United States will not only enable England to accumulate sufficient potential for the continuation of the war, but, as is clear as God's day, in the very near future, the United States itself will be involved in the war against Germany.

Perhaps the Fuhrer sees this opportunity and tries at the last moment to attract Stalin as an ally, because if the United States joins England, the position of Germany will become extremely complicated, not to say, will become hopeless. In any case, their people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, close to Ribbentrop, hinted to the generals that they should not interfere with plans for a trip to the East for the time being - at least until the end of Molotov's visit to Berlin ...

Meanwhile, Hitler continues to brief the generals on his plans to crush England.

"Before spring comes," the Fuhrer emphasizes, "when we invade England, it is necessary to capture Gibraltar, Malta, the Canary and Azores, Portuguese Madeira and, if necessary, occupy Portugal." To do this, German troops will be passed through the territory of Spain and will act together with the Spanish troops, since Franco, frankly lying to Hitler, at our last meeting confirmed his desire to enter the war.

Hitler is clearly confused, recent events unsettled him. He wants to show that he still has some influence on his allies. His eyes sparkling with excitement, he vividly and vividly paints for them a picture of a radical change in the situation in the event of the complete expulsion of the British from the Mediterranean.

The generals, listening to Hitler, find his thoughts sound. Yes, no doubt, it would be great to capture Gibraltar, Malta, the Azores, Madeira, the entire coast of North Africa, and ride the Suez Canal. But what forces? Where can we get them to interrupt the flow of reinforcements and cargo going from the USA to England, from England to the Mediterranean, from India and Australia to Egypt?

Everyone present knows that at the very moment when they, immersed in the deep leather armchairs of the Reich Chancellery, listen to the rantings of their Fuhrer and indulge in dreams, the lone German ship Admiral Scheer, under the cover of polar night, a snowstorm and a magnitude eight storm, is trying to slip along the coast of Greenland to the Atlantic in order to reach the communications of the British and inflict at least some damage on them. No one knows yet whether he succeeded or not. Well, if it succeeded, what would it actually change?

He will sink several English transports, but in the end, of course, he will be caught by the British and destroyed. German submariners demonstrate miracles of heroism and combat skill. Not a day goes by that they don't sink some English transport. Courageous young faces of famous underwater aces do not leave the pages of German

newspapers.

It is pleasant to listen to the Fuhrer, as always it is pleasant to listen to a man carried away by a dream, but the only rational grain that the generals take out of this meeting is the inevitability of a campaign in the Balkans. If we are unable to compete with the British on

sea, if we cannot land troops on their damned islands, then we will not allow them to create their outpost even in the most remote corner of the European continent ...

In London, in his vast office on Downing Street, Winston Churchill, pacing from corner to corner, dictated to the typist the text of his forthcoming speech in Parliament. The prime minister was dressed in a rumpled dinner jacket, its lapels constantly raining ashes from a huge cigar, which the head of the British government took out of his mouth only to take a sip of whiskey and soda and thereby put his thoughts into work.

state.

Both the typist and the stenographer saw that today, November 5, 1940, their boss was in an unusually excited state. Dictating his speech, the prime minister was thinking about something completely different. He perfectly mastered the art that Napoleon was once famous for: he dictated six letters at once, while talking with ten visitors on various topics, but at the same time thinking about something of the most important.

Important was the intelligence report, citing reliable American sources.

From the very beginning of Operation Sea Lion, the Germans understood the impossibility of its implementation and were not going to seriously undertake an invasion of the British Isles. All their activities in this direction, including air raids and a submarine war intensifying every day, are diversionary actions to disguise their true intentions - an attack on the Soviet Union.

This information, which came from America, seemed too pleasant a miracle to be true. For two months British intelligence had been sending messages from Moscow that Stalin intended to oppose Hitler in the very near future. On the western borders of the USSR, a huge army is being deployed and put on full alert, which, no doubt, at the present time will crush and crush everything that the Wehrmacht can oppose to it. By the will of Stalin, the country was turned into a huge military camp. Practically all industry, both heavy and light, has been transferred to a military footing.

At present, after the outbreak of hostilities in Greece, it seems absolutely inevitable that the German front will turn to the south, which puts the Wehrmacht under a flank attack from the USSR. One could hardly expect, the secret service analysts prophesied, that Stalin would not take advantage of this opportunity, especially since the main spearhead of Russia's military deployment is aimed precisely at the Balkans. The Germans, in panic and confusion, are feverishly trying to draw Stalin into negotiations in order to gain time and delay the possibility of a preemptive strike on his part ...

So,

the main premise of the British strategy of 1939, which provides for the inevitability of a conflict between two totalitarian dictatorships, begins to come true,

no matter what cries of friendship they entertained themselves. The global British secret service has capabilities far beyond those of the young, inexperienced, overly militarized, ideologically limited, if not blinkered, secret services of Russia and Germany. In their confrontation, it is easy to make them rush at each other, blinded by misinformation, because, being essentially ordinary bandits, they have all the reflexes of such ...

Experts note with interest that

both armies - Hitler's and Stalin's - are aimed at a rapid offensive and in fact have no concept and, more surprisingly, even defensive plans, apart from impromptu plans for active defense, if the situation during the offensive requires it.

Under such conditions, the army that strikes first will be able to achieve major, one might say, decisive successes, since ... an army that does not have retreat plans, starting to retreat, will inevitably turn its retreat into a stampede and chaotic flight. If it happens that Stalin strikes first, then no one can guarantee that soon the Soviet army will stand on the southern coast of the canal instead of the German one, and Europe will fall under a new tyranny, this time red, not brown, although brown is just a shade red. Or vice versa [28]. But what is worse is unknown, and who will be more difficult to fight with is also unknown. If Hitler strikes first, almost the same thing will happen with the only difference that in this case Hitler has nowhere to go but into the mousetrap of the vast expanses of Russia, where the German and Russian armies will furiously grind each other for at least a year, and God willing, and longer.

This will, among other things, mean the gradual withdrawal of Hitler from Europe, the inevitable turn to our rear, which we, having accumulated enough strength, will strike. Here is the diagram to work with. The press has already been instructed to publish materials to the effect that a German landing in the south of England is not only possible, but very likely in the spring or summer of next year, because the country's resources are exhausted, and so on in the same spirit. Darker.

British intelligence on the Continent, with its usual skill, has already spread rumors about the complete demoralization of the population caused by the German bombing, about the fatigue of the army, about the general spirit of hopelessness hovering over the British Isles.

"Once the autumn-winter storms and bad weather pass," the Times wrote, "new trials inevitably await Britain and every Briton must be ready for them. Unfortunately, the picture that we are seeing in the country and in the army does not leave much room for optimism ... The losses of our merchant fleet are growing, aviation forces are dwindling, our fleet is not able to protect the sea routes vital for the country, and hardly anyone or there is one hundred percent certainty that the royal armed forces are able to repel the inevitable German invasion next summer. (Most recently, at a meeting of the Imperial Military Council, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Alenbrook, and the commander of the land defense of the metropolis, Alexander, almost word for word expressed their opinion: "If he sticks his head on our island next summer, then such a catastrophe awaits him, from which he will only come to his senses in the next world." He is, of course, Hitler. However, the military always tends to exaggerate their capabilities.)

Although the military's self-confidence was encouraging, and the tone of the newspaper articles set by himself could be ignored, no one understood better than Churchill how serious the situation was and how overstretched all the forces of the country were. Local fascist organizations, although they went into a semi-underground state after the start of the war, almost openly carried out propaganda against the continuation of the war, which was beneficial "only to the Jews."

The legal Communist Party, instigated by Moscow, just as openly, but with even greater peremptoryness, shouted something about an imperialist war, calling on the proletarians of all countries to unite under the sunlight of the Kremlin stars.

But the most dangerous thing was that England was already on the verge of financial bankruptcy. Its assets, which stood at \$4.5 billion before the war, were practically used up, including private citizens' holdings in America that were confiscated and sold by His Majesty's government.

It was already clear to everyone that England would quickly be unable to continue the war without supplies from the United States. At the same time, under the "pay in cash and carry it yourself" law, she could not receive any supplies without having dollars.

The British ambassador to the United States, Lord Lothian, who flew in from Washington, inspired hope in the prime minister, conveying to him the words of President Roosevelt: "We will find a way to provide the British with the materials they need on rent or even on loan." Roosevelt, according to Lothian, is determined to enter the war on the side of England, but cannot overcome the resistance of the isolationists without having a majority in Congress. However, the increasing frequency of incidents with American merchant ships being attacked by German submarines and surface raiders in the oceans greatly excites public opinion in the United States. America has always been dragged into war by some incident at sea: the *Louisitania* into the last war, the cruiser *Maine* into the Spanish war. Something similar should happen very soon. God forbid, Churchill escaped ...

Churchill received the news of the Italian attack on Greece while shaving in the bathroom. And he cut himself, although he was waiting for this event. A great opportunity was created to "disturb" all the Balkans, to force Hitler to turn south - away from England and closer to the borders of the Soviet Union. He insisted that the reinforcements destined for Egypt be diverted to help the Greeks. No one can still figure out whether this decision was one of Churchill's big mistakes, or his big strategic victory ...

In the meantime, he has finished dictating his speech, which will be given in Parliament tonight and broadcast to the world on BBC waves. This speech differed little from Churchill's other speeches, except for its ending:

"We have only one single unchanging goal. We are determined to destroy Hitler and all traces of the Nazi regime. Nothing can turn us away from it, nothing. We will never negotiate, we will never enter into negotiations with Hitler or with any of his gang. We will fight him on land, we will fight him at sea, we will fight him in the air until, with God's help, we rid the earth of his very shadow and free the peoples from his yoke ... And even if - what I don't believe for a moment that our island or a significant part of it will be captured and people will die of hunger, our overseas empire, armed and guarded by the English fleet, will continue to fight until, on the day predicted by God, the New World from all his strength and power will not come forward to save and liberate the Old World ... "

Stalin received a translation of Churchill's speech when all his thoughts were on the upcoming parade on Red Square in honor of the 23rd anniversary of the October 1917 coup. The parade, according to the plan of the leader, should be such that the whole world shuddered, struck by the power of the Red Army and the invincible unity of the Bolshevik party and people. This is especially important in connection with Molotov's forthcoming visit to Berlin.

The essence of the English Prime Minister's speech was already reported to him, translating the speech directly from its broadcast on the BBC. Looking through the translation, Stalin drew attention to the fact that at the end of his speech Churchill did not rule out the possibility of the capture of the British Isles or a significant part of them by the Germans and openly called for help from the United States in a panic. Things, apparently quite bad.

People's Commissar Timoshenko, the head of the GRU, General Golikov, the chief of the general staff, General Meretskov, as well as Malenkov and Zhdanov, who were present in the office, naturally agreed with Stalin's opinion. Moreover, Filipp Golikov gave a brief background on recent events. German landing exercises on the coast of northern France continue day and night. Soldiers chest-deep in icy water are practicing tactical landing techniques, pulling artillery guns onto the coastal hills with ropes and cables, tanks directly from the transports bite into the coast.

Army General Meretskov, silently listening to Golikov's report, recalls that the Germans have only two specialized tank landing ships, each of them capable of carrying two tanks. It is also interesting that German aviation practically does not participate in the landing exercises, as well as the fleet. In the course of the exercises conducted by the Germans, it is not at all clear what forces will cover the landing from the sea and air. All this is very doubtful.

But Army General Meretskov is silent. His relations with Stalin became very cool, and with the people's commissar Timoshenko completely deteriorated. They obviously didn't work. The People's Commissar of Defense, having the most vague idea of the work of the General Staff and the amount of knowledge that the head of this most important military institute should have, considers Meretskov "very literate" and has already buzzed Stalin's ears, demanding his replacement and suggesting Zhukov as a candidate for this post. The leader, whose knowledge of the activities of the General Staff is as insignificant as that of Timoshenko, and boils down to understanding the General Staff as some kind of large all-army special distributor, although he dislikes Meretskov for indecision, nevertheless he is in no hurry to answer. He already looked at Zhukov's personal file, and even the level of education of Timoshenko's candidacy he is doubtful...

Meanwhile Golikov continues his message. The Germans, according to the head of the GRU, are doing everything correctly and logically.

Since the weather at the present time makes landings impossible, Hitler quite rightly shifts the center of gravity of operations to the Mediterranean basin, planning to clear the Mediterranean of the British before the spring-summer of next year. The German plan is elegant and simple. In cooperation with Franco, with whom an agreement has already been reached [29], Gibraltar will be captured sometime in January. By this time, the Italians should resume the offensive in Egypt and push the British back behind the Suez Canal. In this regard, major operations are expected of the Italian fleet, which, according to our naval attaché in Rome, is currently concentrated in Taranto - on the sole of the Italian boot and is ready to start a struggle with England for supremacy at sea. The Italian navy is far superior in material terms to the forces that the British are at present able to devote to the Mediterranean.

Thus, the loss by the British of their positions in the Mediterranean will greatly facilitate Hitler's task of capturing the British Isles.

The hope of the British for the entry into the war of the United States is unlikely. The political situation in the United States is such that President Roosevelt, who does not have a majority in Congress, however much he would like to, cannot drag the country into hostilities on the side of England. His entire campaign program, which is conducted in violation of the US Constitution, is based on the assurance of public opinion that the United States does not intend to interfere in

European war.

Italy's attack on Greece has created a fundamentally new situation in the Balkans, which opens before us the possibility of direct intervention in events. After the outbreak of hostilities, an urgent mobilization of troops was carried out by Bulgaria and Turkey, claiming part of the Greek territory. This means that an outbreak of hostilities can be expected that will cover the entire Balkans. The British had already begun landing on Greek territory. The Germans may react sharply. Golikov looks at Stalin. Stalin is silent.

Thus, Golikov sums up, until the summer of 1941, a constant increase in the volume of hostilities against England is expected, the peak of which, apparently, will be at the end of June - the beginning of July, since it was during this period in the English Channel according to meteorological observations over the past 50 years is the most favorable weather for landing. This, the head of the GRU concludes, gives us an opportunity... He looks at Stalin. Something very gloomy ... Golikov selects the smoothest words: "Gives us the opportunity to take the necessary measures to further strengthen the defense capability of our Motherland."

Everyone is looking at Stalin, who is sitting gloomier than a cloud. He has not been feeling well lately: he has chills, high blood pressure, his temperature fluctuates, sometimes reaching 38.5. The most experienced doctor Kogan tells the leader in detail what is happening to him. In men over 60, the body is undergoing a restructuring that requires longer rest, changes in diet and lifestyle. Not without reason, Comrade Stalin, men at the age of 60 are sent to a well-deserved rest.

The schedule of Stalin's life is completely abnormal, even suicidal. Constant night drinking in the country with their pets, turning nights into days, and days into nights, an abundance of spicy food, alcohol, excessive smoking. Stalin had already suffered a heart attack and a stroke. Albeit in a mild form, but at his age it is very dangerous.

Predicting his own death, Professor Kogan offers Stalin to retire for at least six months and rest under the constant supervision of doctors.

The eyes of the chief tigrino turn yellow. Who sent this Jew? What forces imply his isolation, allegedly under the pretext of a state of health? Army? Party apparatus? English intelligence? He asks Beria to figure out what kind of dark forces have built a nest in the system of Kremlin hospitals and clinics.

Beria smiles. And it is clear to the fool what kind of forces! International Zionism.

Figure it out, the leader mutters, not reacting in any way to the discovery of the NKVD chief.

A heavy head makes it impossible to respond quickly, as in the old days, to a new change in the situation due to the Italian invasion of Greece. We'll figure it out later. Let Comrade Molotov go to Berlin. In early December, we will hold a conference and operational games with comrades from the Politburo and the military. Then we will decide exactly what to do.

He looks at Tymoshenko with sick eyes: "Let comrade Zhukov prepare the main report for the conference."

Nobody is surprised. Zhukov Okrug on the main line. Him to start - to him and report. At the point of impact of the Kyiv Special Military District are Romania and Bulgaria, and behind them lies the buzzing, disturbed hive of the Balkans.

And the topic of the report of General of the Army Zhukov is defined precisely and unambiguously: "The nature of the modern offensive operation."

Throughout October, the report was written by the chief of staff of the Kyiv district, General Bagramyan. By November 1, as ordered, the draft report was sent to the People's Commissar. He, without reading it, handed it over to Meretskov, who carefully studied it and had to approve it. Stalin himself refused to read the report, saying that he would listen to it at the conference and discuss it during the upcoming strategic game ...

On November 6, at a solemn meeting at the Bolshoi Theater on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the October Revolution, the main speech is made by the famous "zits-president" of the USSR Mikhail Kalinin, whose own wife is in a concentration camp, which, however, does not in the least prevent her husband from fulfilling his "presidential" duties and loudly praise the immeasurable wisdom of Comrade Stalin.

Noting that "of all the major countries, the USSR is the only one that is not involved in the war and scrupulously observes neutrality," Kalinin then switches to "new speech", full of vague hints that such a situation cannot be considered eternal and that the Soviet people need to be ready for any surprises. Emphasizing with pleasure that the events in Europe once again confirmed Lenin's great predictions about the agony of capitalist society, which is currently engaged in self-liquidation, clearing the way for the victorious march of socialism, guided by the dictatorship of the proletariat, the "all-Union headman", to the stormy applause of the hall, proclaims toasts in honor of the great Party of Lenin - Stalin and in honor of the great leader and teacher of all peoples, Comrade Stalin.

Rising heavily to his feet, Stalin greets the crowd of jubilant apparatchiks with a weak movement of his hand, causing a new outburst of hysteria. Many in this frenzied hall are already on the lists of planned liquidation, but do not yet know it ...

The Pravda newspaper, commenting on Kalinin's speech, did not hide his pleasure, broadcasting: "What we are now seeing in the capitalist world is a process of brutal destruction of everything created by previous generations. People, cities, industry, culture - everything is ruthlessly destroyed.

Noting that the Soviet people enjoy peace thanks to the wise policy of Comrade Stalin, Pravda nevertheless allowed itself to ask the question: can the Soviet people look indifferently at the death of European civilization and not come to its aid, fulfilling its historical mission as the savior of mankind?

And so that no one would have any doubt that the Soviet people are capable of fulfilling their historical mission, the day of November 7, 1940 was turned into a grandiose militaristic show, which neither the country, turned by the efforts of Comrade Stalin into a single military camp, nor the rest of the world has ever seen, who, it seemed, should have gotten used to the medieval imperial ferocity and splendor of the military parades of the first country of the victorious proletariat. In front of the mausoleum, where, like a pharaoh, lay the embalmed corpse of the leader of the world proletariat, bristling with bayonets and barrels of all calibers, troops lined up. From the tomb of the leader, his heirs, led by Stalin, could see in the columns of tanks, self-propelled guns and armored vehicles blackening behind the Historical Museum, clear evidence that the cause of Lenin lives and wins, and will soon win completely. Soon, very soon, if not the whole world, then at least its better half, we will cover with the Hammer and Sickle, as has already been done on our national emblem ...

Marshal Timoshenko, holding a piece of paper in his hand, where his speech is printed in inch letters on a special typewriter, roars through microphones, addressing the troops: "The Red Army is ready, at the first call of the party and government, to deliver a crushing blow to anyone who dares to violate the sacred borders of our socialist state !

Who dares? Nobody knows who will dare. Therefore, according to anyone whom the Party points out. For the unfinished Finns, for the Romanian boyars, for the Bulgarians and Turks, for the imperialists of all stripes, for the wreckers and saboteurs, for the Trotskyists and kulaks. At the first call of the Party and the Government. Thousand voices "Hurrah!" roars over the square, drowning out the thunder of military bands, the roar of soldiers' boots and tank engines.

Choking with delight, Pravda rejoices together with a single people, rallied around a single leader:

"The military parade in the capital of our country was really grandiose. All types of troops demonstrated before Comrade Stalin and the leaders of the party and government their readiness to defend the sacred borders of the Soviet Union. The parade demonstrated the real power of the Soviet Army. The squares of our cities shuddered from the thunder of powerful engines and the rhythmic march of the battalions. Squadrons of combat aircraft flew over our cities in perfect formation. There were many of them and they were everywhere: over Moscow, Riga, Lvov, Orel, Tallinn, Chernivtsi, Voronezh, Kiev, Odessa, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Sevastopol, Tbilisi, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Yerevan, Vyborg, Krasnoyarsk, Baku, Alma-Ata , Vladivostok and over other cities. In total, more than 5,000 aircraft of various types and classes took part in the air parades. There should have been more of them - 8,000 - but due to bad weather in some places, air parades did not take place. Our proud Stalinist falcons fly on wonderful planes created by glorious Soviet aircraft designers ... "

Armadas of warplanes impressed the numerous military attachés gathered on Red Square, as well as the Romanian, Finnish, German and Turkish observers who followed the first air parades over Chernivtsi, Vyborg, Lvov and Yerevan. For the first time, an air parade was also held over Baku, which, unlike other places, was dominated by fighters, clearly making it clear to the British that they should think three times before deciding to carry out their threat to bomb the Baku oil fields ...

This was especially important, since the Leningrad Military District, brought to full readiness, was only waiting for an order in order to complete the somewhat protracted problem of Finland. In order to raise the morale of the soldiers, a rumor was spread around the district that 10,000 captured Red Army soldiers, handed over by the Finns after the conclusion of peace into the hands of the Soviet authorities, were transferred to the Arkhangelsk region, where they were shot to a single man. The political agencies did not deny the rumor.

As it turned out later, it turned out to be the purest truth. The commander of the district, General Kirponos, who for some unknown reason received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union in the last war with Finland, personally inspected the troops, clearly dreaming of a second gold star and, of course, not suspecting that he had less than a year to live and that a special officer's bullet in the Kiev bag would interrupt his dizzying military career, saving him from inevitable captivity ...

In Leningrad itself, due to bad weather, the air parade was not held, replacing it with a very representative naval parade. Such parades were held in Tallinn and Libau.

Powerful naval parades, in addition to ground and air parades, also took place on

Black Sea. In Vladivostok, everything was somewhat more modest - I did not want to annoy the Japanese.

The embassy transmitters began to work feverishly. Military, naval and air attachés reported to their headquarters their first impressions of the unprecedented all-Union military performance staged by Stalin. The headquarters were concerned not only and not so much with reports of new types of Soviet weapons shown for the first time at "grand" parades, but with a more general question: for whom was this performance intended? Why did Moscow clang so loudly with its fanged mouth? Who does she scare and who does she want to settle down as a reliable ally? It was already clear to everyone that it was time for Stalin to make up his mind, that every day he had less room for maneuver and less time to decide: which side did he want to take in the war he had provoked?

The role that Stalin prepared for the Soviet Union was incomprehensible to the world, because Stalin could not independently fight against the whole world, despite all his aggressiveness, cunning and adventurism. Any careless movement, any military or even political step, inevitably dragged Stalin into the war either on the side of England or on the side of Germany.

And the upcoming visit of Molotov to Berlin at first glance indicated that the Soviet-German military alliance was not far off. However, British intelligence analysts shrugged their shoulders skeptically. Hardly! Potential allies have no common goals, except that Hitler will let Stalin's troops pass through his territory and give them the honor of landing in England instead of the Wehrmacht. Or send them to North Africa to help the Italians. All this is fantastic, as well as the reverse options: Stalin lets German troops into Central Asia for a campaign in India and Iran. Both Hitler and Stalin are aimed at Europe, in particular at the Balkans, and in general - at each other. The centripetal forces of the military and geopolitical shift inevitably push them towards each other with bayonets at the ready.

November 10, 1940 at 18.45 Molotov left Moscow for Berlin. The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was accompanied by a large retinue, which, in particular, included Vladimir Dekanozov - the same Dekanozov, who quite recently was Stalin's governor in Lithuania, planting communist ideals there by the usual methods of mass executions, arrests and deportations. Now he was supposed to take the post of Soviet ambassador in Berlin instead of Shkvtsev, who fell into disfavor.

While Molotov's special train, consisting of several wagons of a Western European design, raced through the territory of Belarus and torn Poland to Berlin, an unexpected event occurred that Molotov did not bother to report, apparently considering the news not particularly interesting in the light of the agenda of the proposed negotiations. The Germans, on the contrary, considered it so important that they did not hesitate to wake up Field Marshal Keitel in the middle of the night, and he, in turn, dared to disturb the Fuhrer at half past six in the morning, which was allowed to be done only in exceptional cases.

As it turned out, on the night of November 11-12, British planes, having risen from the Illustrious aircraft carrier, launched a torpedo-bomb attack on the main base of the Italian fleet in Taranto. Although there were ridiculously few aircraft - 10 torpedo bombers and 6 bombers - three Italian battleships, including the newest Littorio, on which so many hopes were placed, were disabled for a long time, and one of them, Conte di Cavour, as it turned out later, forever.

Those who still doubted it finally became quite clear that one could not count on any real help from the Italian fleet in the strategic Mediterranean plans. But there was no one else to count on, and without a fleet, it was rather reckless to make any plans in the Mediterranean basin, since such plans smelled of adventure from a mile away.

Against the backdrop of burning Italian battleships, which were saved from final destruction only by the shallow waters of the bay, somehow, without much surprise, the message was received that the commander of the British forces in Egypt, General Wywell, whose tiny army the Italians had promised back in October to throw out of the Suez Canal, unexpectedly made reconnaissance in combat. Wywell, apparently, did not set any global goals for his troops, except to probe the enemy, but the results were stunning. Wherever the few mobile groups of the British came into contact with the enemy, the Italians either fled in panic or surrendered. Within three days, the 38,000-strong army of General Wywell captured 38,000 Italians and was forced to stop to assess the situation ...

Therefore, when on a cloudy rainy morning on November 13, the Molotov train approached the Anhalt station in Berlin, there was a somewhat bewildered expression on the faces of the top leaders of the Reich who met him, which did not prevent the meeting of the head of the Soviet government from being arranged with all possible solemnity.

On the station building, the red banners of the German and Soviet flags fluttered in the wind, symbolizing the commonality not only of ideology, but also of the claims to speak on behalf of the working class. Oriental symbols of national revival - the Hindu swastika and the Hiram sickle and hammer - either hid in the folds of red cloths, or emerged from them in a formidable warning of the perishing Christian civilization of Europe. The platform until the exit to the station square filled with people was decorated with flowers and branches of fluffy Grunwald trees. A little further away, gleaming with the steel of dagger bayonets and deep Teutonic helmets, the honorary company of the Berlin grenadiers froze at the command "attention". The platform was packed with representatives of various German government departments, members of the diplomatic corps, the highest ranks of the Wehrmacht, as well as German and foreign journalists. The employees of the Soviet embassy stood in a separate group, rightly not expecting anything good for themselves from the arrival of the new ambassador, whose vigorous activity both as an Armenian militant and as a "butcher" from the NKVD was well known to them ...

Behind the chain of oilcloth cloaks of the SS guards, silently and without any emotion, the top leaders of the Third Reich, allocated according to the protocol to meet the Stalinist emissary, watched the approach of the Molotov train: Molotov's old "friend" - von Ribbentrop, Chief of Staff of the High Command, Field Marshal Keitel, chief of the Labor Front Dr. Ley, the all-powerful Reichsfuehrer SS Himmler, Director of the German Foreign Ministry Secretary of State Weizsacker, Press Secretary Dr. Dietrich and Burgomaster of Berlin Stig.

Despite Ribbentrop's best efforts, the meeting on the platform turned out to be very dry and formal, even with a hint of tension. Short handshakes, politely raised hats, sharp guttural shouts of commands to the guard of honor, the gleam of bayonets, carbines thrown "on guard", the sounds of warlike anthems of both countries, the procession to the waiting limousines - all this against the backdrop of black wet umbrellas and the continued pouring of rain. Ribbentrop tried to joke, Molotov kept a stone face, reminding the American journalists watching the meeting ceremony of a corrosive grammar teacher from a provincial school ...

From the station, the cortege of cars headed for the Soviet embassy, where immediately, in a "laid" atmosphere, a preliminary conversation between Molotov and Ribbentrop took place in the presence of Dekanozov and translators: from the Germans, Hilger, already known to us, and the personal translator of the Soviet People's Commissar Pavlov.

Molotov and Ribbentrop already knew each other too well to waste time on diplomatic "shooting". Both were well aware that they were neither the architects nor the inspirers of the foreign policy of their states, but only the conductors of the adventurous plans of their obsessive leaders, and that one careless word could cost Ribbentrop his career, and Molotov his head.

However, if Ribbentrop was not taken seriously in Germany, rightly considering him a "boy" under the Führer, then Molotov was looked at with a certain degree of respect. To survive in the bloody Kremlin intrigues and to keep such high posts under Stalin, it is not enough to be just a scoundrel of the first order. Other qualities are needed here, to which the German leaders instinctively aspired, but in the short period of the existence of the Nazi Reich they were not able, but rather did not have time, to achieve them. It was necessary to hate one's own people in the way that only the Bolshevik leaders could do, it was necessary to boil in the insidious bloody Lenin's cauldron, to absorb the famous slogan "I don't give a damn about Russia, because I'm a Bolshevik" in order to turn two hundred million of my compatriots into brainwashed slaves through their merciless mass extermination. Not only that, but also dream of a similar fate for all of humanity, sending yesterday's friends and accomplices to be executed according to the lists, anticipating that, perhaps, he himself is already included in the next list. But it was necessary to continue working in the name of the triumph of the cause of their own gang, until a bullet in the back of the head cut off the ebullient activity, giving only at the last moment the opportunity to shout: "Long live Stalin! Long live the party!"

Many understood that this was not at all easy, and therefore they looked with interest and respect at the Stalinist People's Commissar, apparently forgetting that the life of the terrible bacillus of Bolshevism, already dying in an unnutritious Western European environment, was returned by the German General Staff with the blessing of Kaiser Wilhelm, for some reason hoping that it will be controlled...

Slightly shy in front of his gloomy Soviet colleague, Ribbentrop began the conversation, noting that since he made two trips to Moscow last year, many events had happened, about which he wrote to Stalin in order to note the German point of view on the situation in the world. in general and on Russo-German relations in particular. Since today the Fuhrer will receive Molotov for more detailed negotiations, he, Ribbentrop, does not want to anticipate these negotiations, but will return to a detailed exchange of views with Molotov after his conversation with Hitler.

Molotov replied that he was aware of the content of the letter to Stalin, which gave a general overview of the events that had taken place since last autumn, and he hoped that the analysis given in the letter would be supplemented by an oral statement by Hitler regarding the general situation and Russo-German relations.

There was a silence, which Ribbentrop broke by declaring that although he had already written to Stalin about this, he took the opportunity to once again emphasize Germany's complete conviction that no force on earth could prevent the fall of the British Empire. England is defeated, and the question of when she will recognize herself as finally defeated is a matter of time. Perhaps it will happen soon, as the situation in England is deteriorating every day.

All those present involuntarily noted a certain hesitation with which Ribbentrop delivered his victory speech. But Ribbentrop was one of the first in Germany to recognize

about the British raid on Taranto and the catastrophe of the Italian army in the African desert. As for Molotov, he did not know about this event in Berlin in mid-November 1940, so, apparently, he never knew about it.

Germany, continued Ribbentrop, would bombard England day and night. German submarines will soon be used to their full potential and will finally undermine the power of Great Britain, forcing her to stop fighting. A certain anxiety in England is already noticeable, which allows us to hope for a close denouement.

Ribbentrop paused, waiting for some retort from Molotov, but he was silent, pursing his thin lips and fixing his gaze somewhere over the head of the Reich Minister. Ribbentrop continued:

"England, of course, hopes for the help of the United States, whose support, however, is in question. In terms of possible ground operations, the entry of the United States into the war is of no importance to Germany. The help that England can get from the American fleet is also very doubtful. America, apparently, will limit itself to sending military equipment to the British, primarily aircraft. It can be assumed with high probability that only a small part of these deliveries will reach England.

The Axis powers, militarily and politically, completely dominate continental Europe. Therefore, thanks to the extraordinary strength of their positions, the Axis powers are now thinking more not about how to win the war, but about how to end the war already won. The natural desire of Germany and Italy to end the war as soon as possible prompts them to look for allies who agree with this intention. As a result, the Tripartite Alliance was concluded between Germany, Italy and Japan. In addition, he, Ribbentrop, can confidentially report that a number of other countries have declared their solidarity with the ideas of the Three Powers Pact.

The Führer is of the opinion, continues Ribbentrop, that the spheres of influence of Russia, Germany, Italy and Japan should be delimited, at least in the most general terms. The Fuehrer studied this question long and deeply and came to the following conclusion: considering the position that these four nations occupy in the world, it would be wisest of all if they, striving to expand their living space, turn to the south. Japan has already turned south, and it will take centuries for her to consolidate her territorial gains in the south.

Germany and Russia have demarcated their spheres of influence, and after the New Order is finally established in Western Europe, Germany will also begin to expand its living space in a southerly direction, that is, in the areas of the former German colonies in Central Africa. Similarly, Italy is moving south into North and East Africa. Therefore, he, the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs, wondered if Russia would also turn south in the future in order to obtain a natural outlet to the open sea, which is so important for Russia?

Ribbentrop fell silent, making it clear that he had said everything he wanted to. Without expressing any emotions, Molotov coldly asked what kind of sea did Mr. Imperial Minister mean when he spoke of Russia's entry into the open sea?

Ribbentrop replied that, according to Germany, after the war there would be huge changes throughout the world. Germany is confident that there will be big changes in the status of the British Empire. So far, both sides have benefited from the German-Russian agreement, both Germany and Russia, which has been able to effect legitimate changes on its western frontiers.

The question now is whether they can continue to work together, and whether the Soviet

Russia to draw the appropriate conclusions from the new order of things in the British Empire, that is, would not Russia's most advantageous access to the sea be through the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea? Here, of course, the position of Turkey is important. Turkey in recent months has reduced its relations with England to the level of formal neutrality. The question is what interests Russia has in Turkey.

In this connection, Ribbentrop continued, he perfectly understands Russia's dissatisfaction with the Montreux Straits Convention. Personally, he, Ribbentrop, believes that the Montreux Convention, like the Danube Commissions, must disappear and be replaced by something new. This new agreement must be concluded between the Powers that have a special interest in this matter, and above all between Russia, Turkey, Italy and Germany. Germany finds it quite acceptable that in the Black Sea Soviet Russia and the adjoining Black Sea states should have certain privileges over others.

countries of the world. It is assumed that Turkey will not only become a factor in the coalition of countries opposing the escalation of the war, but will also be ready to voluntarily reject the Montreux Convention and, together with Germany, Italy and the USSR, conclude a new Straits Convention that will satisfy the just demands of all parties and give Russia certain privilege.

If these ideas seem feasible to the Soviet government, he will gladly come to Moscow and discuss these issues personally with Stalin. Apparently, in this case, the simultaneous presence of his Italian and Japanese colleagues, who, as far as he knows, are also ready to arrive in Moscow, will be useful. All this needs to be discussed.

Slightly weary of Ribbentrop's lengthy reply, Molotov remarked wearily that he understood well the Reich Minister's statement about the enormous importance of the Tripartite Pact. However, as a representative of a non-belligerent country, he should ask for some points to be clarified to him in order to better understand the meaning. When the New Order in Europe and the Greater East Asian Space was stipulated in the Pact, the notion of the Greater East Asian Space was rather vaguely defined, at least from the point of view of those who were not involved in the preparation of the Pact. Therefore, he, Molotov, would like to know a more precise definition of this concept.

Somewhat bewildered, Ribbentrop began to confusingly answer that the concept of the "great East Asian space" was new to him, and that it was not clear to him either.
described.

Sensing Ribbentrop's confusion, Molotov decided that it was time to go on the offensive and let the Germans understand why, in fact, Stalin had agreed to involve himself in the negotiations.

"When delimiting spheres of influence for a fairly long period of time, accuracy is necessary," the head of the Soviet government said harshly and sharply, "that is why I ask you to inform me of the opinion of the drafters of the Pact, or at least the opinion of the German government on this matter. Particular care is needed when delimiting the spheres of influence of Germany and Russia. Molotov pauses, and metal cuts through his voice, as in speeches at the Supreme Council, when it was about the enemies of the people. "The establishment of these spheres of influence last year," he continues, "was a partial solution, which, with the exception of the Finnish question, whose detailed discussion I intend to do later, looks outdated and meaningless in the light of recent events and circumstances."

Ribbentrop was momentarily speechless at this unexpected turn of the conversation. If Molotov finds all previously agreed spheres of influence "outdated and meaningless," then what new conditions will Stalin set for Germany, sandwiched between a rock and a hard place, between the noose of the English naval blockade and the Russian steam blockade?

ice rink?

Glancing nervously at his watch, Ribbentrop suggests interrupting the conversation in order to prepare for a conversation with the Fuhrer. Molotov agrees with him, noting that it would be nice to have breakfast now and take a little rest from the road.

After Ribbentrop's departure, Molotov and Dekanozov have breakfast. Molotov, like all mortals, has his weaknesses: he is more afraid of germs than death, so all the dishes and cutlery used by the presovnarkom are pre-fried under pressure in an autoclave that accompanies Molotov everywhere, except for trips to Stalin's dacha, where according to this cause he experiences the greatest torment...

At breakfast, drinking boiled milk in small sips, Molotov and Dekanozov discuss Ribbentrop's statement. It seems that everything is clear: do not poke your nose in Europe, with Turkey, if you want, then negotiate, but without fail with the participation of us and the Italians. If you want to snatch your piece, then make your way through Iran and Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf, cleaning up other pieces of the crumbling British Empire as you go. So here it is...

Immediately after breakfast, Molotov and Dekanozov, accompanied by experts and translators, went to the imperial office. A string of black limousines, escorted by motorbikes, entered the Charlottenburg Highway and turned onto the Wilhelmstrasse.

Slowing down, the cars drove into the courtyard of the new Imperial Chancellery, the building of which Hitler and his favorite Albert Speer designed together, making it some kind of mixture of Gothic, classics and the legendary caves of the ancient Teutons. Eagles with a swastika in their paws, a smooth portico hanging over the columns, from which velvet panels of Soviet and German flags hung heavily, frozen figures of sentries in gray-green helmets - all this created an ominous impression of a secret temple of black paganism, resurrected under the unexpected slogans of proletarian solidarity and national exclusivity, but retaining the basis of its religious and mystical ideology - an uncontrollable passion for mass human sacrifices, brought to the accompaniment of incantations that no one understands.

This, which has become a textbook statement by Hitler, was, in essence, only a more frank reaction to Lenin's fiery appeal at the Third Congress of the Komsomol in October 1920: "Our morality is completely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. Our morality is derived from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat!"

The miserable Berlin plagiarist did not know how to express himself so elegantly, he called everything in his own words, bringing the whole world into a state of shock. He was understood correctly, but those who listened to Lenin at the Third Congress were not fools either - any deceit, violence and any atrocity are declared permissible if they are committed in the "interests of the class struggle of the proletariat." And the most capable student of the leader of the world proletariat was, of course, Stalin.

By the time of the events described, neither Stalin nor Hitler had any illusions about each other and went into negotiations with the sole purpose of gaining time until the optimal moment when it was possible to inflict such a crushing blow on the opponent, after which he would not rise.

The short solemn ceremony in the courtyard of the imperial office ended, and a cavalcade of black Mercedes, accompanied by motorcyclists in steel helmets, rushed to the Bellevue Hotel, where Hitler appointed a reception for the Soviet delegation. The high, bronze-cast doors of the ancient palace of the Prussian kings opened,

passing Molotov and his retinue.

Accompanied by Secretary of State Otto Meissner, Stalin's envoys passed through a suite of dimly lit halls, the walls of which were hung with old paintings in heavy frames, medieval weapons and armor. Precious wall upholstery, high ceilings with artistic stucco, gilded chandeliers, light furniture of the Louis XVI era did not go well with the black uniforms of the SS men who stood along the walls with their hands raised in a Nazi salute.

In the hall adjoining Hitler's office, the experts of the Soviet delegation remained to while away the time over soft drinks in the company of security officers. Only Molotov and Dekanozov with a group of translators went to the doors of the Fuhrer's office. Two blond SS men of gigantic stature, clicking their heels, flung open the high doors that stretched almost to the ceiling. Standing with their backs to the jamb and raising their right hand, they seemed to form a living arch, under which Molotov and his retinue passed into Hitler's office - a huge room with high windows and tapestries on the walls.

To the right of the entrance stood an elegant round table, a sofa, and several easy chairs. At the opposite end was a huge polishing desk, at which sat the Fuhrer in his semi-military jacket with a belt and a white shirt and tie. In the corner, on an ebony stand, was a gigantic globe.

With some embarrassed smile, Hitler left the table and went to meet the newcomers, out of habit raising his hand in a party greeting. Having greeted everyone, Hitler said that he was glad to greet the Soviet delegation, inquired about Stalin's health and, with a gesture of the host, offered to sit in easy chairs around the round table. At that moment Ribbentrop, Hitler's personal translator Schmidt and adviser to the German embassy in Moscow, Hilger, appeared in the opposite corner from behind the drapery, having the task of the British to find out what the negotiations would be about, a bunch of tasks from the NKVD, including drawing up a detailed plan of the Hitler cabinet, and a task from the native Gestapo to stop the excessively talkative Ribbentrop's attempts to say something superfluous. Molotov and Dekanozov, with their interpreters Pavlov and Berezhkov, sat down in easy chairs. Negotiations have begun...

Naturally, Hitler began by declaring that the main topic of the current negotiations, as it seemed to him, was the following: in the life of peoples it is rather difficult to outline the course of events for a long time to come. Personal factors are often responsible for the conflicts that arise. He, nevertheless, believes that it is necessary to try to bring order to the development of peoples, and if possible for a long time, in order to avoid friction and prevent, as far as humanly possible, conflicts.

Russia and Germany are two great nations that, by the very nature of things, will have no reason for a conflict of interests if each nation understands that the other side needs some vital things, without which its existence is impossible. Moreover, the systems of government in both countries are not interested in war as such, but need peace more than war in order to carry out their internal program.

Hitler speaks incoherently, heaping phrases on top of each other. Translators have difficulty forming the Russian text. Pausing in this stream of generalities, Hitler casts a glance at Molotov. He, nodding his head, assures that he fully agrees with the views expressed by Hitler.

The situation in which today's conversation is taking place is characterized by the fact that Germany, unlike Soviet Russia, is in a state of war. Much of what had to be done during the war was dictated precisely by its course and could not have been

predicted in advance. In general, not only Germany, but also Russia received considerable benefits. For the future relations of both countries, the success of the first year of political cooperation is extremely important.

Hitler falls silent, waiting for Molotov's remarks. He notes that everything the Fuhrer said is absolutely correct.

Perhaps, Hitler continues his thought, that neither of the two peoples satisfied their desires one hundred percent. In political life, however, even 20-25 percent of the requirements implemented is already a big deal. By cooperating, both countries will always receive at least some benefits. Their enmity is beneficial only to third countries.

Hitler looks questioningly at Molotov. He nods his head again, saying that the Fuhrer's ideas are absolutely correct and will be confirmed by history, and that they are especially applicable to the present situation. Based on these thoughts, Hitler notes, he once again soberly considered the question of German-Russian cooperation at a time when military operations had actually ended.

Hitler looks at Molotov, but he is silent, with his whole appearance making it clear that the Fuhrer's last phrase about the end of the war needs clarification.

Of course, there are some complications, Hitler agrees with Molotov's silent question, which force Germany from time to time to respond to certain events with military action. At present, hostilities are being waged against England, so far only at sea and in the air, the intensity of which is limited by the weather. England's response is ridiculous. The Russians can see for themselves that the allegations of the destruction of Berlin are a fabrication. As soon as the weather improves, Germany will be in a position to deliver a strong and final blow to England.

Thus, for the moment, Germany's aim is not only to make military preparations for this final battle, but also to try to clarify the political issues that will matter during the crushing of England and after it. In doing so, he came to the following conclusions:

First, Germany does not seek military assistance from Russia.

Secondly, due to the incredible expansion of the theater of operations, Germany was forced, in order to confront England, to invade territories remote from Germany, in which she was generally not interested either politically or economically.

Perhaps Mr. Molotov noticed that in a number of cases there were deviations from those initial boundaries of spheres of influence that were agreed upon between Stalin and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In some cases, he - the Fuhrer - was not ready to make concessions, but he understood that it was desirable to find a compromise solution, as, for example, in the case of Lithuania. However, in the course of the war, Germany encountered problems that could not have been foreseen at the beginning of the war, but which are extremely important from the point of view of military operations.

It is now important to consider the question of how, leaving aside momentary considerations, to outline the cooperation between Germany and Russia and what direction the development of German-Russian relations will take in the future. In this case, the following points are important for Germany:

The first is the need for living space. During the war, Germany acquired such vast expanses that it would take her 100 years to use them completely.

Second, some colonial expansion in North Africa is needed.

Thirdly, Germany needs certain raw materials, the supply of which she must guarantee herself under any circumstances.

And fourth, it cannot allow hostile states to establish air and naval bases in certain areas.

In this case, Russia's interests will not be affected in any way. The Russian Empire can develop without the slightest damage to German interests.

Molotov, constantly nodding his head at the last words of Hitler, breaking the protocol, noticed that everything the Fuhrer said was absolutely true.

Smiling embarrassedly at this remark by Molotov, Hitler continued: if both countries come to understand this fact, they can establish mutually beneficial cooperation and save themselves from complications, friction and anxiety. It is quite obvious that Germany and Russia will never unite into a single state. Both of them can build their own future if they take into account the interests of the other side. Germany has no interests in Asia other than general economic and commercial interests.

As for Europe, there are several points of contact between the interests of Germany, Russia and Italy. Each of these countries has an understandable desire to have access to the open sea. Germany wants to go to the North Sea. Italy wants to destroy the "bolt" set on Gibraltar, and Russia is striving for the ocean. The question is how great are the chances of these three powers to really get free access to the ocean without having to conflict with each other on this issue.

However, while the war with England lasts, no steps can be taken that are in any way contrary to the goals of ending the war with Great Britain. In other places, similar problems also arise, which, however, are important only during the war. Thus, Germany did not have any political interests in the Balkans, but at the present time it is forced to intensify its activities there in order to provide itself with certain raw materials. The reason for this is purely military interests. For similar reasons, Germany cannot bear the very idea that England can get bridgeheads in Greece for the construction of air and naval bases. The Reich is obliged to prevent this under any circumstances.

Germany would have preferred to end the war last year and demobilize her army in order to resume peaceful work, since from an economic point of view, any war is bad business.

Well-trained waiters appeared noiselessly and brought coffee in sumptuous Meissen china cups. Taking advantage of the pause, Molotov again expressed his full agreement with the Fuhrer's opinion that achieving the goal through military measures is much more expensive than through peaceful means. He had nothing to compare to. The "peaceful" occupation of the Baltic states and Bessarabia, including the transport costs for the deportation to Siberia of about a third of the local population, cost ten times less than the capture of the Karelian Isthmus ...

Without touching his coffee, Hitler continued, repeating that in the current situation, Germany, due to hostilities, was forced to become more active in areas in which she was not politically interested, but in which ...

After taking a sip of coffee, Molotov caught himself thinking that he no longer fully perceived this labyrinth of Hitler's general reasoning. The translators also tried, piling on each other

Russian subordinating conjunctions: which, which ... We'll have to read the transcript more carefully.

"Besides all this," Hitler continued to weave his lace, "there is the problem of America. The United States is currently pursuing an imperialist policy. They help England, at best, in order to continue their own rearmament and, by acquiring bases, to strengthen their military power. In the distant future, the issue of close cooperation between those countries whose interests will be affected by the expansion of the sphere of influence of this Anglo-Saxon power, which stands on a foundation much stronger than England, will have to be resolved. However, this is not a question to be solved in the near future, at least not in 1945. Only in 1970 or 1980, at the earliest, will this Anglo-Saxon power be able to threaten the freedom of other peoples..."

Hitler looked at Molotov, but found nothing but fatigue on the face of the people's commissar and realized that it was time to finally move closer to Soviet-German relations.

"I fully understand," the Fuhrer said with a note of confidence, "Russia's efforts to get ice-free ports with safe access to the open sea. Perhaps both Russia and Germany did not achieve all that they planned to achieve, but the successes of both sides were, nevertheless, great. If we take an unprejudiced look at the still unresolved problems, it is clear that serious successes can be achieved by both partners in the future. As regards the Balkans, Germany will resist with military force any attempt by England to gain a foothold in Thessaloniki. Germany still keeps in mind the unpleasant memories of the Thessaloniki front of the First World War ... "

"Why is Thessaloniki such a danger?" - for the first time allowed himself to interrupt the Fuhrer Molotov.

"Because of the proximity to the Romanian oil fields," Hitler replied. "Germany intends to defend them under any circumstances. However, as soon as peace prevails, the German troops will immediately leave Rumania.

Hitler fell silent and took a sip of his already cold coffee, making it clear that now he wants to listen to Molotov.

Molotov noted that the Fuhrer's statements concerned general issues and that he was generally ready to accept these considerations.

"Before I left Moscow," Molotov emphasized, "Stalin gave me precise instructions, and everything I am going to say now coincides with Stalin's views. I fully agree with the Führer's opinion that both partners have benefited greatly from the German-Russian agreement. Germany received a secure rear: it is generally known that this was of great importance for the course of events during the year of the war. However, Germany received significant economic benefits in Poland. Thanks to the exchange of Lithuania for the Lublin Voivodeship, any friction between Russia and Germany was prevented. The German-Russian agreement of last year can thus be considered fulfilled in all points except one, namely Finland.

Molotov's voice begins to sound irritated: "The Finnish question still remains unresolved. And so I ask the Führer to answer: do the points of the German-Russian agreement regarding Finland remain in force? From the point of view of the Soviet government, there were no changes here.

Now about the Tripartite Pact. What does the "new order" mean in Europe and Asia, and what role will be assigned to the USSR in it? These issues need to be discussed during the Berlin talks.

and the proposed visit to Moscow by the Reich Foreign Minister, which the Russians are definitely counting on. In addition, questions about Russian interests in the Balkans and the Black Sea, concerning Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, should be clarified. The Soviet government is interested in the "new order" in Europe and would like to have an idea of the boundaries of the so-called "great East Asian space".

Molotov fell silent, taking a breath. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. It was evident from Hitler's face that he was surprised and very annoyed by such a stream of questions and claims.

Ribbentrop, who knew his Fuhrer well, was afraid that Hitler would throw one of his tantrums at Molotov. But Hitler restrained himself and calmly replied that the Tripartite Pact was intended to regulate the state of affairs in Europe in accordance with the natural interests of the European countries, and in fulfillment of this, Germany is now turning to the Soviet Union so that she can express her opinion regarding the areas of interest to her. Without the assistance of Soviet Russia, no agreement can be reached in all cases. This applies not only to Europe, but also to Asia, where Russia itself will participate in the definition of the great East Asian space and declare its claims. Germany's task here is reduced to mediation. In no case will Russia be confronted with a fait accompli. When he, Hitler, attempted to create the aforementioned coalition of powers, the most difficult issue to be resolved was not German-Russian relations, but the question ...

Molotov hardly listened to general discussions, his head was heavy, and only Hitler's last phrase about the need to expel the United States from all parts of the world was so sincere that the Soviet People's Commissar, who hated this stronghold of world imperialism no less than the Fuhrer himself, readily nodded his head, declaring, that he fully agrees with the statements of the Fuhrer regarding the role of America in the future world.

"Besides," he said, "Russia's participation in the Tripartite Pact seems absolutely acceptable in principle, provided that Russia is a partner and not an object. In this case, he does not see any difficulties in the participation of the Soviet Union in the common effort. But first, the aims and meaning of the Pact need to be more precisely established, especially in connection with the definition of the "great East Asian space".

Instead of answering, Hitler glanced at his watch and, citing the possibility of an air raid warning, suggested rescheduling the negotiations for the next day. Molotov, tired of the Fuhrer's long and confused monologues, agreed. Hitler, smiling shyly as always, wished the Soviet delegation a good time in Berlin. Molotov recalled that in the evening there would be a big reception at the Soviet embassy, and invited Hitler. The Fuhrer thanked the People's Commissar and said that, if time permits, he would try to come

Hitler did not come to the reception, but both of his deputies, Hess and Goering, came to the luxurious mansion of the Soviet embassy on Unter den Linden.

With the outbreak of hostilities, Hitler issued an official statement that if anything happened to him, Hitler, Rudolf Hess would become the Fuhrer of Germany.

Tall, thin, with a gloomy expression of an ascetic pale face, with excited eyes of a fanatic, Hess looked with some fear at the banquet table in the form of a huge letter "P", decorated with bright carnations and antique silver. (On the occasion of the reception, a rich service for 500 people, preserved in the embassy since tsarist times, was put on the table.)

Unlike Hess, even at the reception he appeared in a modest party tunic and

belt, Reichsmarschall Goering felt very at ease in the medieval luxury of the Soviet embassy. In the uniform of the Reichsmarschall embroidered with silver (this title was personally awarded to him alone), decorated with numerous stars and orders, the overweight figure of Goering stood out against the background of the brown and black service jackets of the invited party functionaries and the strict suits of the Soviet diplomatic staff. The figure was so bright that for many years the intelligence services of almost all countries were interested in her, playing on Goering's predilection for luxury, beautiful women and cocaine. Few knew then (and even today) that the sister of the Reichsmarschall was recruited through the Comintern by Soviet intelligence. A former World War I ace who has since been considered a war criminal, Goering constantly played, and maybe actually was (no one knows where the game ends and the essence begins) "shirt-guy" to such an extent that even brought a smile to Molotov's face, which in itself was no small achievement.

Confiding to the head of the Soviet government that he, Goering, would be instructed to command the victory parade in London, since it was his dashing pilots who brought (or will put in the very near future) England to its knees, the Reichsmarschall invited Molotov to attend the parade. Molotov asked what date he should book a ticket to London for.

"On July 15!" Goering answered without a shadow of doubt in his voice.

But he especially liked the new Soviet ambassador Vladimir Dekanozov, which was very useful, since Dekanozov had a special task from the NKVD to please Goering.

Nearby they looked very comical: a huge fat Reichsmarshal, sparkling with the stars of his uniform and diamonds on his fingers, and a small, thin Dekanozov in a black three-piece suit bought at Detsky Mir, as his subordinates joked. The Reichsmarschall, however, did not invite Dekanozov to the victory parade in London, but invited him to his estate in Karin Hall "to hunt and have a great time."

There were rumors that Goering walked around his estate in the toga of the Roman emperors with a golden laurel wreath on his head. Dekanozov plucked up the audacity and decided to check this rumor. Goering burst out laughing and, patting the baby ambassador on the shoulder, said: "In my house you will see things more interesting than some kind of golden wreath."

Hess also smiled when he was asked if he could confirm the information of Soviet intelligence that he, Hess, masterfully plays the accordion. There was also an accordion. Hess embarrassedly took it in his hands and, being, like Goering, a veteran pilot of the First World War, played a sad melody known to every German soldier: "Their hatte aine kamerade ..."

Sad, and at the same time full of optimism, the music made an impression on Soviet listeners. (After the war, it will appear in the USSR as the song "About the Red Drummer".)

At that moment, the British decided to take part in the sincere fun of the banquet. Air raid sirens howled, the mirror glass windows trembled from the roar of anti-aircraft guns, making it clear to specialists that the night air defense system of the Reich capital was in an embryonic state, since the sirens howled when the bombers were already over the city. Göring was visibly embarrassed and left quickly. (Later Churchill would say to Stalin: "We knew about the presence of Mr. Molotov in Berlin and decided in this way to remind us that we are still alive.")

The building of the Soviet embassy did not have its own bomb shelter. The hosts and guests rushed to the exit. Accompanied by adjutants Hess, Ribbentrop, Molotov and Dekanozov hastily

We went down the wide marble staircase and drove by car to the Bellevue Palace, where a comfortable bomb shelter was equipped in the cellars. The rest of the embassy staff managed to run to the nearest metro station. Many stayed at the embassy.

The radio worked, transmitting to Moscow a coded message about the first conversation with Hitler. Stalin's irritation was felt in the response code: the leader insisted on specifically resolving issues related to Finland, Bulgaria, Romania and the Turkish straits with Hitler. In the event of a positive resolution of these issues, Molotov was instructed to agree to the entry of the USSR into the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Thus, a member of the Russian section of the Comintern - Comrade Stalin - actually agreed to the accession of the world's first country of the victorious proletariat to the anti-Comintern pact. What can you not do in the name of a great idea! ..

Hitler also had not the best night of his life. Reports of the defeat of the Italian fleet at Taranto, of Wywell's unexpected sortie in the desert, and the humiliating British air raid on Berlin in the midst of negotiations with Molotov - all this, of course, did not contribute to a good mood and called for revenge.

He called Goering, who arrived directly from the Soviet banquet at the air defense headquarters of the capital and brought additional chaos to his already not entirely clear work, and ordered the British to be taught a lesson "so that the whole world shuddered." Goering did not immediately understand what they wanted from him. "Turn one of their cities into ruins! Hitler yelled into the phone. - Destroy it completely! Wipe off the face of the earth!" "What city?" Goering asked, always fond of specific orders. "Anyone," Hitler barked back, pointing at random at the map of England. The Führer's finger is stuck in the space between Birmingham and Coventry northwest of London. Closer to Coventry. "Coventry!" Hitler proclaimed. Goering did not mind and began to give the necessary orders.

The next day, November 13, negotiations between Hitler and Molotov resumed. Both were pale. For a fifty-year-old Kremlin apparatchik, a virtually sleepless night spent under the roar of German anti-aircraft guns and explosions of British air bombs, combined with a radio jam from his beloved leader, was a strong enough impression to somewhat knock him out of the diplomatic rut. Hitler, as we have already noted, also had little reason to rejoice. The upcoming conversation promised to be heightened nervous. And so it happened.

Hitler began by returning to Molotov's remark, made during yesterday's conversation, about the fulfillment of the German-Russian agreement "with the exception of one point, namely Finland."

During the Russo-Finnish War, Germany fulfilled all its obligations to observe absolute benevolent neutrality.

"The Russian government," Molotov put in, "had no reason to criticize the position of Germany during this conflict."

Hitler nodded his head and remarked with some degree of confidence that he even detained ships in Bergen carrying weapons and ammunition to Finland, which Germany actually had no right to do. Such a pro-Soviet position of Germany during the Russo-Finnish War ran into serious resistance from the rest of the world, especially Sweden.

Now the real situation is this: in accordance with the German-Russian agreement, Germany recognizes that politically Finland is of paramount interest to Russia and is located in its zone of influence. However, Germany has to take into account two

moment: firstly, while the war is going on, Germany is extremely interested in obtaining nickel and timber from Finland; secondly, Germany does not want any new conflicts in the Baltic Sea, which will further restrict her freedom of movement in one of the few merchant shipping areas still open to Germany. It would be completely wrong to say that Germany occupied Finland. German troops are only being transported through Finland to Kirkenes, about which Germany officially informed Russia. Due to the length of the route, trains have to stop two or three times on Finnish territory. However, as soon as the transit of military contingents is completed, no additional troops will be sent through Finland.

He, the Fuhrer, emphasizes that both Germany and Russia

should have a natural interest in preventing the Baltic Sea from becoming a war zone again.

Since the Russo-Finnish War, there have been significant changes in the prospects for military operations, since England has long-range bombers and fighter-bombers at its disposal and can seize a bridgehead on Finnish airfields. In addition to this, there is also a purely psychological factor, which is extremely burdensome. The Finns courageously defended themselves and won the sympathy of the whole world, especially Scandinavia.

In Germany itself, during the Russo-Finnish War, people were to some extent dissatisfied with the position that, as a result of the agreement with Russia, Germany should have taken and actually took. For the above reasons, Germany does not want a new Russo-Finnish war. However, this does not affect Russia's legitimate claims. Germany proves this again and again with its position on many issues, in particular, on the question of strengthening the Åland Islands. However, while the war is going on, her economic interests in Finland are as important as in Romania. Germany counts on respect for these interests also because she once demonstrated a complete understanding of Russian interests in Lithuania and Bukovina. In any case, she does not have any political interests in Finland, and she fully recognizes the fact that this country is part of the Russian zone of influence.

There was a pause. Everything that Hitler said was perfectly clear: you have already "grabbed" enough, much more than you were supposed to. Calm down! We won't let you eat the rest of Finland. Say thank you for Lithuania and generally forget about the possibility of further expansion in Europe.

Without looking at the Fuhrer, Molotov recalled that the 1939 agreement had in mind a certain stage of development, which ended with the end of the Polish War. The second stage ended with the defeat of France and now they are in the third stage.

Molotov's voice sounds frankly offended. What would you have done without us if we had not provided your rear and provided you with everything you need to wage war? And now you reproach us with Lithuania and try to take away our legitimate booty in the form of Finland?

Here Ribbentrop intervened in the conversation and dryly reminded that, of course, Russia did not revise the peremptory conditions, but nevertheless insisted on it very stubbornly.

"This is not at all the case," Molotov objected irritably, "the Soviet government never refused to leave everything as it was envisaged by the original agreement. In any case, having ceded Lithuania, Germany received Polish territory as compensation!"

"This exchange, from an economic point of view, cannot be called equivalent," Hitler put in grimly, pursing his lips.

"What about that strip of Lithuanian territory that you still haven't handed over to us?" Molotov asked. The Germans were silent.

"Certainly," Molotov admitted, somewhat perking up, "the question of Bukovina affects territories not mentioned in the Secret Protocol. Therefore, Russia first limited its demands to Northern Bukovina. In the current situation, however, Germany must understand the interest of the Russians in Southern Bukovina as well."

"Even if only part of Bukovina remains with Russia," Hitler replied, "that would also be a significant concession on the part of Germany. In accordance with the oral agreement, the former Austrian territory should enter the German sphere of influence."

Hitler was clearly beginning to lose patience. No one had ever dared so brazenly extort prey from him.

"Well, you know," Molotov objected, "the changes made in relation to the strip of Lithuanian territory and Bukovina are difficult to compare with the changes that Germany made in many other areas by force of arms." Like this! You have already captured half of Europe, and you are bargaining with us for insignificant strips of land that already belong to us by right.

After listening to a translation of Molotov's last remark, Hitler grumpily replied that the so-called "changes by force of arms" were not the subject of the agreement at all.

"There were or weren't," the Soviet chairman of the People's Commissar raised his voice, spitting on the protocol, "but everything that we captured is crumbs compared to what you captured ..."

"But we are at war, and you are not! Hitler yelled back. "We pay for all acquisitions with the blood of our soldiers!"

Ribbentrop looked imploringly at the Fuhrer. Molotov turned purple. There was a painful silence. Hitler pulled himself together and calmly continued:

"The Soviet Union must understand that within any broad cooperation between the two countries, benefits can be achieved in a much wider range than the minor changes currently being discussed. Much greater success can be achieved provided that Russia does not now look for benefits in the territories in which Germany is interested for the duration of the war. The more

Germany and Russia, standing back to back, will succeed in the struggle against the outside world, their successes will be great in the future, and the same successes will be less if the two countries stand against each other. For the first time, there will be no force on earth that can withstand our two countries."

topics

After listening to Hitler, Molotov declared his full agreement with the Fuhrer's latest conclusion. However, in order to lay a solid foundation for these relations, clarity must be established on matters of secondary importance that poison the atmosphere of German-Russian relations. These primarily include the question of relations between the USSR and Finland. If Russia and Germany reach an understanding on this

issue, it can be settled without war. But there can be no question of the presence of German troops in Finland and the holding of political demonstrations in that country directed against the Soviet government.

All this was said in such an ultimatum tone that everyone looked at Hitler in fear. No one has dared to speak to the Fuhrer in such tones since he came to power. But this time Hitler restrained himself, saying that the second part of Molotov's statement was not subject to discussion, since Germany had nothing to do with the demonstrations in Finland.

"By the way," the Fuhrer remarked, "demonstrations are very easy to organize, and then it is extremely difficult to find out who was their real instigator." As for the German troops, he can assure that as soon as a general agreement is reached, German troops will cease to appear in Finland.

No longer listening to Hitler's objections, Molotov, as if reading a verbal note, declared that the Soviet government considered it its duty (!) to finally settle the Finnish question. This does not require any new agreements. According to the existing German-Soviet agreement, Finland is included in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union.

In a display of uncharacteristic patience, Hitler again repeated that Germany did not want to allow war in the Baltic Sea and that she badly needed Finland as a supplier of nickel and timber. Unlike Russia, Germany has no political interest in Finland and does not occupy any part of Finnish territory. The transit transportation of troops will be completed within the next few days. After that, new echelons with troops will not be sent.

"The Soviet position on this issue is something that is not entirely clear to me," Hitler suddenly announced. "In this regard, a very important question for Germany arises: does Russia intend to start a new war against Finland?"

Taken by surprise by a direct question, Molotov evasively replied that everything would be all right if the Finnish government abandoned its ambiguous attitude towards the USSR.

In other words, Molotov honestly answered Hitler that war was inevitable, since the Secret Protocol was not about the Karelian Isthmus, but about all of Finland.

The Fuhrer got it right. He began to talk confusedly about the possibility of England and even the United States intervening in the Soviet-Finnish conflict, which would force Germany to be active too ...

But Molotov was at his best, and, fulfilling Stalin's order for the indispensable capture of Finland, which was a matter of honor for the leader, not profit, apparently listened to Hitler's unequivocal warning about German intervention in the event of a new Soviet-Finnish war.

"I don't understand," he said desperately, "why Russia should delay its plans for six months or a year." After all, the German-Russian agreement did not contain any time limits, and within their spheres of influence, neither side's hands were tied.

Seeing that Molotov did not understand the essence of his previous answer, Hitler repeated that there should be no more war in the Baltic.

Increasingly irritated, Molotov replied that he did not understand the fear of the Germans that war might break out in the Baltic. Last year, when the international situation for Germany was worse than today, Germany did not raise this issue.

With difficulty restraining himself, Hitler, in whose voice an ominous shrill note was already slipping,

said that he, too, knew a little about military affairs and considered it very likely that in the event of a new Russo-Finnish war, the United States would gain a foothold in both Finland and Sweden.

He paused, and then suddenly asked Molotov with a sneer: "Will Russia declare war on the United States if they intervene as a result of a new conflict with Finland?"

"This question is not relevant," Molotov grumbled angrily.

Hitler chuckled: "When it becomes relevant, it will be too late to make a decision."

"Yes, no one is going to fight in the Baltic," the people's commissar snapped angrily.

"Well, wonderful," the Fuhrer was delighted. "Then everything will be in order, and we will consider that our discussion was purely theoretical."

Hitler leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and gestured to Ribbentrop with his hand.

"Summarizing the above," began Ribbentrop, "we can come to the following conclusions:

Finland remains in Russia's sphere of influence and Germany will not maintain troops there.

In fact, there is no reason at all to make a problem out of the Finnish question. Therefore, if you look at things realistically, there are no disagreements between Germany and Russia."

"So we have nothing to argue about," Hitler said peacefully, "since both sides agree in principle that Finland is included in the Russian sphere of influence."

The Fuhrer emphasized that after the subjugation of bankrupt England, her gigantic world possessions of 40 million square kilometers would be divided.

All countries must stop all differences among themselves and focus solely on the division of the British Empire. This applies to Germany, France, Italy, Russia and Japan.

Molotov replied that the main thing was the settlement of German-Soviet cooperation, to which Italy and Japan could later join.

As if he did not hear what Molotov had said, Hitler spoke of the fact that the future steps would not be easy, and emphasized in this connection that Germany wanted to create a worldwide coalition of interested powers, which would unite all those who wanted to benefit from the bankrupt British economy.

Molotov replied that he would like to talk about a territory closer to Europe, more precisely, about the territory of Turkey. As a Black Sea power, the Soviet Union is linked to several countries. Therefore, the Soviet Union expressed its dissatisfaction with Rumania in connection with the fact that the latter accepted the guarantees of Germany and Italy without consulting the USSR.

Hitler shrugged.

Molotov then spoke of the straits, noting that they were England's historic gateway to attack the Soviet Union. In this regard, he, Molotov, wants to directly ask the Fuhrer how Germany will look at providing the USSR with Bulgaria, located closest to the straits, as well as guarantees on exactly the same conditions on which Germany and Italy gave them to Romania, that is, with the introduction of troops and with the lease of naval bases. The Soviet Union would like to get the consent of Germany to this, and also, if possible, of Italy.

It was something new. Intelligence vaguely reported that Stalin had already set his sights on Bulgaria as the next victim, but neither Hitler nor Ribbentrop expected that the USSR would formally ask for Germany's consent to this.

Hitler sharply replied that the German and Italian guarantees to Romania were the basis of what persuaded Romania to cede Bessarabia to Russia without a fight. As for the question of Russian guarantees to Bulgaria, if the USSR wants to provide these guarantees on the same terms as the German-Italian guarantees to Romania, the question first of all arises as to whether Bulgaria itself requested such guarantees? Did Tsar Boris ask Stalin about this? He, the Fuhrer, knows nothing about such requests from Bulgaria.

In addition, he, of course, must learn the opinion of Italy, and only after that he will be able to make any statement. Now he is more interested in the question whether the Soviet Union believes that it will be able to sufficiently guarantee its Black Sea interests in the event of a revision of the Montreux Convention?

Molotov explained that the Soviet Union wanted to guarantee itself against a strike from the straits, not only on paper, but in practice, and he was confident that the USSR would be able to reach an agreement with Turkey. That is why he wants to return again to the question of Soviet guarantees to Bulgaria.

"Bulgaria asked you for guarantees or not?!" Hitler yelled.

Molotov realized that he had driven Hitler out of himself, and therefore explained that he was asking the Fuhrer not for a final decision, but only to express his opinion on this issue.

Hitler replied that under no circumstances could he take a definite position until he spoke with the Duce, since for Germany this issue was of secondary importance ...

At this point, Hitler interrupted his speech and drew the attention of those present to a later time, saying that, in view of possible British air attacks, it was better to end the negotiations now, since the main issues had already been sufficiently discussed. In the evening he will be busy with other matters, and Reichsminister Ribbentrop will complete the negotiations.

Everyone got up from the table. Farewell handshakes, tired and not very sincere smiles. Hitler, a hospitable host, escorted Molotov through a suite of rooms and passages to the very exit to the courtyard. Before saying goodbye to the Presovnarkom, Hitler said: "I consider Stalin an outstanding historical figure. He will go down in history as a great man. Yes, and I myself expect to go down in history. Therefore, it is natural that two politicians like us meet in person..."

Farewell to Hitler turned out to be unexpectedly warm. The flashes were constantly flashing, the cameras were chirping. Both posed with pleasure and readiness, realizing that they were making history: subsequently, these photographs would spoil a lot of blood for Molotov and would be considered secret in the USSR for almost half a century ...

Ribbentrop's office, though much smaller than Hitler's, was luxuriously furnished: patterned parquet flooring reflecting all objects, vases of bronze and porcelain, old paintings and tapestries, heavy brocade curtains.

Ribbentrop invited Molotov and Dekanozov to a round table in the corner and declared that, in accordance with the wishes of the Fuehrer, it would be expedient to sum up the negotiations. Ribbentrop had hardly had time to say that he had sketched out some of the proposals of the German government, when suddenly the air raid sirens blared piercingly. WITH

British bombers entered the capital of the Reich on both sides. There was a tense silence in the office. Outside the window, anti-aircraft guns barked, somewhere nearby there was a dull bang, and glass trembled in the high windows.

Ribbentrop's face was distorted by a spasm. In the eyes of the Reichsminister it shone: "God, punish England!" Having overcome himself, Ribbentrop broke the painful silence at the table: "It is not safe to stay here. Let's go down to my bunker. It will be quieter there..."

Resuming the conversation so tactlessly interrupted by the British in the shelter, Ribbentrop announced that he wanted to explain to Herr Molotov his view on the prospects for the policy of cooperation. The main thing is the question of developing relations between the countries of the Tripartite Pact - Germany, Italy and Japan - with the Soviet Union.

If the Soviet Union holds the same point of view, he, Ribbentrop, believes that the ultimate goal should be an agreement between the powers of the Triple Alliance and the Soviet Union. He drafted this agreement.

Here Ribbentrop took a piece of paper from his pocket and read its contents in a monotonous voice:

"The governments of the states of the Tripartite Pact - Germany, Italy and Japan, on the one hand, and the government of the USSR, on the other hand, driven by the desire to establish order within their natural borders, agreed as follows:

Article 1 In the Tripartite Pact of September 27, 1940, Germany, Italy and Japan agreed by all possible means to resist the turning of the war into a world conflict and to cooperate jointly in the cause of the speedy restoration of peace throughout the world ... The Soviet Union declares that it approves of these goals and, with for its part, decides, together with the Three Powers, to work out a common political line.

Article 2. Germany, Italy, Japan and the Soviet Union undertake to respect each other's natural spheres of influence...

Article 3. Germany, Italy, Japan and the Soviet Union undertake not to enter into blocs of states and not to adhere to any international blocs directed against one of the Four Powers ... "

This agreement, explained Ribbentrop, is supposed to be concluded for 10 years. The treaty itself will, of course, be public, but with reference to it, a secret agreement can be concluded that determines the territorial interests of the Four Powers. The center of gravity of Germany's territorial interests, without taking into account the territorial changes that will take place in Europe after the conclusion of peace, is in Central Africa. The center of gravity of Italy's territorial interests, without taking into account the territorial changes that will take place in Europe after the conclusion of peace, is in North and North-East Africa. Japan's interests must be clarified through diplomatic channels. The center of gravity of the interests of the Soviet Union presumably lies south of the territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean ...

The German government will welcome the readiness of the Soviet Union to cooperate with Italy, Japan and Germany.

Therefore, convening a conference of the foreign ministers of Germany, Italy and Japan to sign such an agreement becomes the main goal. In addition, he would like to tell Herr Molotov the following:

As Mr. Molotov knows, he, the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs, has always shown a special interest in relations between Japan and the USSR. He would very much like to

Mr. Molotov informed him in what state these relations were at the present time.

We are not very worried about Japan, Molotov said. There is hope and certainty that now the USSR and Japan will make greater progress towards mutual understanding. Relations with Japan have always been complex and contradictory. Nevertheless, now there are reliable prospects for finding mutual understanding.

But as for Turkey, Molotov abruptly changes the subject and begins to speak more harshly, the Soviet Union assumes that, first of all, an agreement should be reached on the straits. Germany and the Soviet Union agreed that the Montreux Convention had lost all meaning.

The questions that interest the Soviet Union in the Middle East, Molotov continued, concern not only Turkey, but also, for example, Bulgaria, which has already been discussed in detail with the Fuhrer.

At that moment, the light went out. Soon it lit up, blinked, went out again and lit up again. The British raid had been going on for more than an hour and a half, forcing the high negotiating parties to hole up in a bomb shelter.

Ribbentrop apologized somewhat embarrassedly and replied that he did not have any comments on the Bulgarian question, except for those that the Führer had already expressed to Herr Molotov. Germany, as the Fuhrer has repeatedly stressed, has no territorial interests in the Balkans. In general, this is a secondary issue. It has been said many times that the main question is whether the Soviet Union is ready and able to cooperate with us in the destruction of the British Empire [30].

Therefore, I would like Mr. Molotov to comment on the problem raised before him. And I would also like to remind Mr. Molotov that he must answer the question whether the idea of access to the Indian Ocean is attractive to the Soviet Union in principle.

Molotov realized that he could not get more from the Germans, but because it happened to him very rarely, he allowed himself to joke. Apparently, the bomb shelter influenced him in a certain way. "Since the Germans consider the war with England already won," he remarked, "and Germany is waging a life-and-death war against England, I have no choice but to assume that Germany is waging a fight for life, and England - "for death".

"I fully approve of the idea of cooperation," Molotov continued, "with the proviso that the parties must come to a complete understanding."

At that moment, the telephone on the corner table rang: Ribbentrop was informed that the raid was over. He offered to go upstairs, but Molotov refused, saying that it was more comfortable in the bunker. They served coffee. The farewell was surprisingly simple and cordial. Ribbentrop apologized for "those English pigs" who always turn up uninvited for the sole purpose of "spitting in the soup." Molotov laughed, noting that he did not regret the raid at all, since thanks to him he had an exhaustive and cordial conversation with the Imperial Foreign Minister.

Everyone was about to leave, but the phone rang again. Ribbentrop picked up the phone and his face fell: a new wave of British bombers was coming towards the city.

Chapter 8

The exceptional impudence of the British, who forced the high contracting parties to spend most of their time in bomb shelters, demanded a quick and cruel punishment.

No matter how hard the Germans tried to explain what happened, a completely illogical and even rather fantastic picture emerged from all their explanations: the deceased made a scandal just at the moment when in Berlin the heads of the Soviet and German governments discussed the ritual of his funeral and gave preliminary orders on the division of his property.

While the fast Berlin-Moscow train sped through Europe back to Moscow, a not in the best mood Molotov, 400 German bombers, appearing in the predawn sky over the English provincial city of Coventry, rained down on him 400 tons of high-explosive and 56 tons of incendiary bombs, as well as 127 parachute bombs. mines to block the River Evan, which flows into Bristol Bay. Despite the fact that aircraft and car factories, machine tools and other military installations were located on the outskirts of Coventry, the Luftwaffe attack hit the historic city center and residential areas. A beautiful cathedral of the XIV century was destroyed, the entire business center of the city was on fire, 600 people were killed, because, as Goering explained the following, the raid had no other goals than retaliation for the British bombers raids on Berlin in previous days.

The British, having concentrated almost all air defense forces in the area of London and their airfields (mainly in the south of the country), left the province virtually defenseless from air strikes. Gradually, German aviation, bearing increasing losses, ceased to storm the British air bases, replacing them with spectacular blitzes over London. But that didn't make the loss any less. Transferring the strike to the English hinterland made it possible to minimize losses and at the same time continue a high-profile propaganda campaign about the brilliant victories of German weapons.

The raid on Coventry confirmed this. All aircraft, except for one that crashed into the sea due to engine failure, returned to their bases. This hasn't happened in a long time!

However, Hitler listened to the joyful report of the Reichsmarschall with a sad and worried expression.

"Congratulations, Herman," he said quietly, "I am glad that the new tactics you have developed have yielded such brilliant results. I hope she redeems herself.

Knowing Hitler well and for a long time, Goering could not find anything to answer. In the congratulations of the Fuhrer, there was clearly a hidden mockery. On the way to his headquarters, the Reichsmarschall had time to think whether it was by accident that Hitler named Coventry as a target of retribution.

Of late, Hitler, according to the testimony of his closest associates, began to love solitude. He could walk for hours in the park, walking his beloved shepherd Blondie. One of the strictest requirements for the Fuhrer's personal guard was the requirement to remain unnoticed. So that the Fuhrer does not see them and is not distracted from his thoughts. Even those who had claims to personal friendship with the Fuhrer, like Hess, Goebbels, Speer and Himmler. And Eva Braun has long lost the desire to break through the adjutants, if Adolf decided to be alone. Duty officers or lackeys who looked into the office from time to time (if the Führer would like a glass of warmed milk with a cake) most often saw him sitting, propping his head in his palm, with wide open, almost unblinking eyes, thinking about something. A rumor spread among the technical staff that in this way the Fuhrer communicates with higher powers, receiving from them

latest instructions and charging with cosmic energy. The leaders of the party were the first to hear this rumor from the technical staff and pretended that they had known about it for a long time. It has been known for a long time, but this behavior of Hitler began only in November 1940. Of course, being a romantic, Hitler patronized all sorts of mystical theories, whether it was Gorbiger's theories of cosmic ice and a high moon, or Gaushofer's hypotheses, colored with quotations from Buddhist and Tibetan teachings, from which the Fuhrer most often repeated: "In the interval between the creation and dissolution of Vishnu- Gesha rested in his own essence, shining with dormant power among the seeds of future lives. True, Hitler was sometimes overwhelmed and he could almost say in a Leninist way that "there is a Nordic and National Socialist science that is opposed to Jewish-liberal science." Sometimes he was even more carried away when he, with a gleam in his eyes, proved that "the so-called earthly surface on which we all live is in fact not convex, but concave. And we live inside like flies in a flask." It is not known whether Hitler was joking and was misunderstood by those who heard him, or really read various Gorbigerian fiction, but it was this Fuhrer's passion that led to the fact that today, November 16, 1940, his mood was completely spoiled.

Once he discussed this theory in the presence of Himmler and Hess, whom, like him, Dr. Gaushofer taught to think in the most incredible paradoxes. Unexpectedly, the question arose, and not whether to check all this in practice? Hitler agreed that if there were a way to prove such a theory, it would crush all previous human worldview, showing the whole world that it is National Socialism that opens the way for humanity into an as yet unknown future.

Hitler did not go into details, but it turned out that his friends did not throw words into the wind. In one of the secret laboratories of the Reich, the first radar stations were created for the country's air defense system. Hess and Himmler considered that it was with their help that it would be easiest to prove the Fuhrer's theory. If the earth is not convex, but concave, then the closest to the walls of the "flask" are those places that are considered to be arctic and antarctic. It is enough to deliver the radars to a high polar latitude, and they will immediately "probe" the walls of the "incubator" with their beams. The polar island of Jan Mayen was chosen as the site of the experiment, where, under the escort of two destroyers, a secret expedition led by Dr. Rudolf Franz was landed. Dr. Franz was the only person privy to the true purpose of the expedition. Everyone else was told that with the help of equipment brought to the island, British ships in Scapa Flow would be monitored. It was this last version that the British intelligence believed, because the scientists had not had time to deploy their equipment, when the English battlecruiser Rinaun appeared off the island, with one of its formidable silhouettes forcing the German destroyers to quickly retreat. Under the cover of Rinaun, the British landed on the island and captured the entire expedition, along with top-secret equipment [31].

But moreover, neither Himmler nor Hess even bothered to report this to Hitler. He learned everything from his naval adjutant Captain 1st Rank Puttkamer!

Hitler had long caught himself thinking that Hess, the same Hess with whom they swore eternal friendship while still in Weimar prison, began to irritate him. Mainly by his antics, for which he not only did not receive permission, but did not even take the trouble to inform Hitler himself about them. For example, Hitler accidentally learns that Hess is taking flying lessons on the latest Messerschmitt-109 fighter. For what? "My Fuhrer," Hess replied, "there is a war going on. And it is possible that I may personally have to defend the skies of Germany, the safety of which you have so recklessly entrusted to Goering. "I won't be at all surprised," Goering frankly told his staff officers, "if one day I find out that this vicious goose has flown to the enemy." The Reichsmarschall never claimed to be a prophet, but he could become one ...

And now, asked who allowed him to throw an expedition with secret equipment on Jan Mayen, Hess, without batting an eyelid, demanded a transcript and, on the basis of its vague wording, proved that the text contained a completely clear order from the Fuhrer to conduct such an expedition.

"So why, Hess," Hitler asked hoarsely, rubbing his throat with his hand, "didn't you report anything to me about the results of the expedition?"

"I thought, my Fuhrer," Hess replied dryly, "that the command of the naval forces was obliged to report about this. After all, the entire expedition was organized for the needs of the fleet, and the fleet took upon itself the security of this enterprise.

Well, of course. Captain 1st rank Puttkamer reported this. After all, it is he who represents the German fleet under the Fuhrer. Usually Hitler with his old friends and associates was very quick-witted. Naoret, it happened, then he would hug him with tears in his eyes, say something like: "Old comrade (Alter genosse), buddy," and he considered the incident settled. And with Hess, how many times has this happened. But then Hitler realized that lately Hess had become so annoying to him: he had developed a habit, at every opportunity, in conversations with Hitler, without fail, as if by a random phrase, to substitute someone under the wrath of the Fuhrer. Either Goering, then Bormann, then Dr. Todt, then the head of the Hitler Youth Schirach, then Hitler's favorite Scheer, then Grand Admiral Raeder. The latter is especially common. Hitler even once asked if Hess himself wanted to take the place of commander-in-chief of the naval forces? Hess dryly refused, declaring that he, as the Deputy Fuhrer for the party, had his own affairs up to his throat.

But Hitler knew well what was happening to his old friend. Secret intelligence reports compiled for him by the 6th Directorate (SD) of the security service said that Hess was unsettled by the ongoing war with his beloved England. He does not hesitate to call this "fratricidal war of two Germanic Nordic peoples" a madness provoked by the Jews so clearly that he, Hess, does not understand how the Fuhrer could succumb to such a provocation? If the troops of the Reich invade England, this will mean the end of the civilization of the Germanic peoples and the complete triumph of world Jewry. My friend Rudolph does not understand that England and her vast empire in itself have been a product of world Jewry ever since Queen Elizabeth the Virgin permitted the free construction of synagogues in her possessions, quickly crushing Spain in such a simple way and founding an overseas colony. The colony named after her Virginia (Virgin) became the embryo of the United States, where in 1588, along with the first Puritan stave church, a stone synagogue was built ...

The great virgin queen looked far away. What would happen to England today if the United States did not exist? Could she single-handedly confront Germany and so proudly and brazenly reject all sincere peace proposals?

Hitler really hoped that in the elections of 1940 the United States would finally elect a new president with whom they would at least somehow be able to agree and he would not pursue such an openly anti-German policy as Franklin Roosevelt. Moreover, he had already served two full terms in the presidency, but nevertheless put forward his candidacy for a third term - an unprecedented event in the history of America! Isn't it too much for a disabled person with paralyzed legs?!

On Hitler's orders, Germany secretly spent more than \$10 million in support of Roosevelt's main rival, Republican candidate Wendell Willkie. Wilkie's entire election campaign was based on the accusation of Roosevelt that, almost without disguise, he was dragging the United States into the war on the side of England. He exposed Roosevelt as a warmonger, frightened Americans with warnings that

that the votes given to Roosevelt would be turned into wooden crosses for their sons, husbands and brothers. Breaking his voice at rallies, Willkie shouted that "if Roosevelt wins, we will be involved in a foreign war no later than five months."

It had an effect on people, but the strangest thing was that Roosevelt did not try to refute his rival. On the contrary, he made the core of his election program an appeal to the Americans not to change an experienced president and his "played" team for a newcomer in such a formidable and uncertain time, when the war blazing in Europe at any moment can scorch the United States with its fire. The Gallup Institute predicted his defeat, and Hitler sincerely hoped that this would happen.

But that didn't happen. Roosevelt won, and his statements immediately after the November 6 presidential election left no doubt about the course of his future policy: at the first convenient moment, stand next to England in the fight against Hitler. Not against Germany, namely against Hitler. German intelligence, which is very at ease in the United States (the FBI monitors them, but does not detain anyone because of the softness of peacetime laws in the United States. On the very first day of the war, the entire German intelligence network in the United States will be liquidated), reports interesting details. Until now, for the entire flow of cargo that has poured from the United States to England since the beginning of the war, the British paid in cash, and now, in terms of dollar resources, Great Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy. It was obvious that England could not continue the fight without receiving supplies from the United States. But under American "pay cash and carry" law, she couldn't get any supplies without dollars. And so Roosevelt, almost the day after his third election to the presidency, according to intelligence, said: "We will provide the British with everything necessary for waging war on rent or on loan."

Roosevelt used the English word "Lend-Lease", and at that time Hitler did not get the full sinister meaning of this completely peaceful word.

But he well understood that his hopes for the rapid exhaustion of England were unrealizable, and it was foolish to wait until the United States was exhausted.

The scheme for Hitler was clear: Roosevelt stood behind Churchill, which he did not think about in September 1939, and the Jews stood behind Roosevelt. And this means that at any moment he will have the United States as an adversary in the war, knowing full well that he will never win such a war, where England and the USA act in an alliance. Although it can somehow be drawn if the country does not panic, as in 1918.

In the summer of that year, when the army was advancing in France, crushing Paris and throwing the English Expeditionary Force into the sea, Hitler, being at his headquarters on the Franco-Belgian border, received there an American journalist, a correspondent for the New York newspaper "Journal American" Carl von Weigand. It was a very unusual move. Hitler did not like to give interviews at all, but he never did this at headquarters. Throughout the campaign, not a single journalist could get through not only to Hitler himself, but even to his press secretary, Dietrich. But Weigand was brought to the Fuhrer's headquarters by Ribbentrop at the request of Hitler himself. There was a long conversation. The next day, Hitler carefully read the entire text of the interview, which he had never done before either. It was a kind of appeal to the United States - in his opinion, logical and impressive. He asked the Americans to take care of America and leave Europe to the Europeans. He specifically emphasized that he was not going and did not want to destroy the British Empire. He only wants peace. However, this statement did not make much impression on anyone in America, and above all on Roosevelt, who called it "a gangster's ranting over the corpse of his victim in the hope of impressing the jury of the future trial that is inevitable."

Every morning Hitler expected some new surprises from Roosevelt. In the ports of Germany and the countries occupied by it, there were many merchant ships flying the Stars and Stripes flag. Hitler was waiting for a message that some American merchant ship had blown up in one of the German ports along with the entire crew. He clearly imagined the headlines of American newspapers demanding immediate retribution, the mournful face of the president signing the War Act, and the malevolent Jewish grins around him.

Was he afraid of it? Oh no! Let America go to war against him, let everything collapse, as in Wagner's *Doom of the Gods*.

It wasn't that. It was infuriating that he clearly saw the threat, but could not do anything to prevent it. On September 28 of this year, Roosevelt pushed the conscription law through Congress and received \$4,800,000,000 for a "defensive measures program" that included building so many ships and planes that it was breathtaking. Recently (November 8), speaking in Munich, Hitler was forced to admit: "As for the size of production in America, they cannot even be expressed in astronomical figures. Therefore, in this area, I do not intend to compete with America. And if he does not intend to compete with America in the field of arms production, then in what way can he compete at all?"

Its designers were not able to create a serial model of a strategic bomber, and America has already built thousands of such machines. They are already secretly concentrating in England, and the concept of strategic bombing of Germany is being developed at the headquarters and all calculations are being made to destroy the entire German industry within one and a half to two years.

Hitler understood that these were not mere threats. England has lost many battles in its history, but has never lost a war. Especially now, when behind her back the powerful silhouette of the United States is becoming more and more clear, not vulnerable to any means of attack that Hitler possesses. It cannot be said that the Fuhrer made no effort to prevent the US threat to Germany. Immediately after coming to power, bewildered (like many others) by the possibilities offered by American democracy, Hitler became obsessed with the idea of "Germanizing" the United States. The idea was based on the fact that in any encyclopedia it was possible to obtain data on the residence of 30 million people of German origin in the United States. Almost half of what lives in Germany itself - 30 million! It is enough to overthrow the government of the United States, and appoint a Gauleiter to rule the country - either sent from Berlin or from Americans of German origin. This is exactly what the fanatic of the idea of "Germanization" of America and the author of the book "Unser America" ("Our America") Dr. Colin Ross proved to the Fuhrer. According to him, these 30 million "represent a huge reservoir of 'Aryan' manpower," ready to be mobilized on the orders of the Fuhrer and form a German army on American soil. Ross was confident that, with the right organization, the German legions would soon be able to carry out a successful Nazi putsch. The victorious march of National Socialism in Germany turned heads, making them dream of a world Aryan revolution. Hitler favorably supported Ross, and Goebbels, fascinated by this idea no less than Ross himself, wrote a whole series of articles about the inevitable "Germanization" of America, frivolously declaring that "there is nothing easier than to make a bloody revolution in North America ... No country has such number of social and racial contradictions". Like their counterparts in Moscow, the Nazis spared no expense in world revolution. As if by magic, organizations of German-Americans led from Berlin began to emerge in the United States: the League of Friends of the New Germany, the Hitler Youth Organization, the Union of German Girls, the Order Service, the North American Union of German Soldiers, etc. similar. A Gauleiter was also appointed - Erns Wilhelm Bohle - a young adventurer, born in England and raised in South Africa, who received a later promotion

"Gau-Ausland", that is, who became the Gauleiter of all Germans living outside the Reich. Operating from his Berlin headquarters at 4 Tiergartenstraße, Bohle set about energetically the "Nazification" of all Germans outside of Germany. Speaking in 1935 at the Nuremberg Congress of the Nazi Party, Bohle told the whole world:

"Now we are in the midst of the struggle to create Nazi Germany abroad ... We know only one concept - an absolute German, who always and everywhere remains a German and only a German. That makes him a Nazi. Blood must be stronger than a passport!"

We must do justice to Bole - his vigorous activity gave excellent results almost everywhere except the United States. On the contrary, the American government used the opportunity to introduce through numerous Nazi organizations its own agents in almost all structures of the Third Reich, including the Reich Chancellery and the main imperial security department.

By the end of 1940, when the law on conscription was adopted in the United States and on September 5 the American government handed over to the British 50 (fifty) destroyers allegedly in exchange for some kind of British bases in the Western Hemisphere, Berlin realized that the United States should be applied simpler and cheaper methods of exposure.

On September 12, a massive explosion rocked the state of New Jersey. The gunpowder factory of the Hercules company in Kenilworth exploded. 52 people died, 50 were seriously injured. The loss was estimated at several million dollars.

It was like a start. Then there was a pause - in Berlin they were waiting for the results of the elections.

When, on November 5, Roosevelt was re-elected president for the third time and everyone in Berlin realized that their truly titanic efforts and huge money had gone to dust, they decided to congratulate the US president with a powerful salute from several sabotage organizations at once.

On November 12, 1940, with a difference of 20 minutes, deafening explosions thundered at three military factories in the states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In Woodbridge, New Jersey, explosions destroyed two factory buildings of a company that produces torpedoes and communications equipment for the needs of the US Navy. In Edinburg (Pennsylvania), the gunpowder factory of the American Cyanamid and Chemical Corporation exploded, and in Allentown (also in Pennsylvania), the gunpowder factory of the Trojan Powder company was destroyed by an explosion. 16 people died, many were injured. Explosions occurred at 8:00, 8:10 and 8:20 in the morning. Commenting on these events, Secretary of War Henry Stimson noted that all this "suggests of Teutonic method."

On the same day, November 12, a powerful crane at a shipyard in San Francisco mysteriously collapsed, and in the city of Atlanta (Georgia), a fire destroyed the city assembly hall, where military equipment worth a million dollars was temporarily stored.

The sabotage campaign, which replaced the propaganda one, no longer set itself the goal of radically changing the course of the foreign policy of the United States. By the very beginning of such actions, the Germans, as it were, acknowledged their defeat, setting smaller tasks for their agents - to inflict the maximum possible damage on a potential enemy even before the official start of hostilities, bringing them closer with each new sabotage and making them completely inevitable.

The pact concluded on September 27 between Germany, Italy and Japan, binding them to joint action if any of these powers was attacked by a state not yet participating in the war, was clearly directed against the United States, but served as little consolation. due to complete incompetence

Italians and the Asian unreliability of the Japanese [32].

Not to mention that both of the allies acquired by Germany were beggars, not knowing, in the cynical expression of US Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, what they would eat tomorrow or if they would eat at all.

Theoretically, the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis would take on a completely different character if Moscow could be fastened to it. Then, against the Anglo-American bloc, it would be possible to create such a powerful Eurasian coalition with practically unlimited economic and human resources that it would be possible not only not to be afraid of American blackmail, but also to speak better with the States themselves (not to mention England).

in the language of power understood by all.

At some point, Hitler himself sincerely believed that Stalin could be persuaded to join the three-power pact and take part in the division of the world, in which the USSR was destined mainly for the southeast direction - the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, India. This was recommended to Hitler by his advisers, who convinced that these regions had been the most coveted for at least 200 years by all Russian rulers, from Catherine II to Stalin.

Dividing the world after the collapse of the British Empire in a serious way was possible only with Stalin. It just so happened that there was simply no one else to be with. For the sake of this, it was possible to abandon his, Hitler's, very vaguely formulated "anti-Bolshevik mission" and use Stalin for the quick and effective collapse of the British Empire. In other words, to use Stalin for actually the same purpose for which Stalin expected to use Hitler - to destroy the British Empire and the entire world capitalist system. What does Stalin want?

1. He wants to occupy all of Finland.
2. He wants to send troops to Bulgaria.
3. He wants to control the Turkish straits. Not to own them, but only to control them.

In the end, all this could be agreed, albeit in stages, but only to get the USSR into the Axis.

If, however, as many intelligence reports suggest, Stalin is playing his own diabolical game, waiting for the right moment to attack Germany, then at least another six months should be won in order to deploy enough forces on the eastern borders and turn these borders into a solid front line.

But then the situation becomes not just critical, but catastrophic. Germany falls into a gigantic grip between the US and Britain in the west, and the Stalinist hordes in the east, while losing virtually the only source of strategic raw materials and materials. The source, thanks to which it was possible to victoriously win back the first year of the war and accumulate resources for another year and a half.

If Stalin turns from a friendly neutral not into an ally, but into an enemy, then the situation will become simply hopeless. This will predetermine the collapse of all the Fuhrer's plans and destroy Germany as a state.

"To all diplomatic missions and services.

Berlin 15 November 1940

The conversations between the German and Soviet governments on the occasion of Molotov's stay in Berlin were conducted on the basis of the treaties concluded last year, and ended with the final agreement of both countries to firmly and resolutely continue in the future the policy initiated by these treaties. In addition, the conversations served the purposes of coordinating the policy of the Soviet Union and the countries of the Tripartite Pact.

In the same spirit, the Soviet "Communique on the negotiations of V. M. Molotov with the leaders of the German government", published in Pravda on November 15, 1940, was sustained:

"During his stay in Berlin on November 12-13 of this year, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Comrade V. M. Molotov, had a conversation with the Reich Chancellor, Mr. A. Hitler and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. von Ribbentrop. The exchange of views proceeded in an atmosphere of mutual trust and established mutual understanding on all the most important issues of interest to the USSR and Germany ... "

On November 18, the Soviet press published photographs of Molotov and Hitler taken in the building of the new Imperial Chancellery. Molotov's face, as usual, did not express anything. Hitler wore one of his tense snake-like half-smiles, a mixture of fear, annoyance and weariness, like (according to The New York Times) the owner of a dubious business, who is suddenly raided by a tax inspector. And only Ribbentrop tried to appear joyful, although he did it badly too.

Comrade Stalin was also not in the best of moods. The leader of all nations began to be tested for strength by their own children. In general, it is not known whether the leader has the right to have children, at least legal ones? Previous "fathers of the nation" like Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible, especially loved by Stalin, had so much trouble from their children that they could serve as a good example for future generations. In the film "Peter I", just released in the USSR, played in Stalin's personal cinema, the leader was especially impressed by the shots of the murder of his own son Alexei by the great reformer. Lenin, as you know, had no legitimate children. Iosif Vissarionovich was slipped by the late Yagoda a certificate that one of the sons of Inessa, working in the Central Committee of the Komsomol, was spreading a rumor that Ilyich himself was his father. This was also indicated by some resemblance to the leader of the world proletariat, especially emphasized by an early bald head, as well as a beard and mustache "a la Ilyich". Stalin did not delve into, but ordered to liquidate, which was done.

Hitler also had no children, for he constantly repeated that he was engaged to Germany.

Stalin had children - as many as three from two wives: two sons and a daughter.

The eldest son Yakov was the first to surprise by marrying the Odessa Jewess Yulia Meltzer, which should have raised a whole storm in the German press, if this storm had not been stopped on the personal instructions of Dr. Goebbels. The leader's anger was terrible - at the time of such a difficult game with Hitler, having a Jewish relative was tantamount to a major diplomatic failure. Under other circumstances, with such a leader's anger, many heads would fly, but anger directed at one's own children is rather anger directed against oneself, and can only result in a premature heart attack [33].

Before Stalin had time to recover a little from this story that happened at the beginning of the year, at the end of October, the second son Vasily, also without even informing his father, married

some Galina Bourdonskaya, who assures that she comes from a lost French soldier of the Napoleonic army. There was nothing to do again. I even had to allow the young to live in the Kremlin. Vasily was given a secret recommendation from his father: so that his wife, for the sake of her own well-being, did not catch the eye of the leader.

The leader of a totalitarian state is always not so much a statesman as the head of a clan - a family, and, naturally, he does not want random people to fall into the "family", carefully following the "amorous" adventures of all his fellow accomplices, so that they stop. Not to mention your own children, if you so carelessly acquired them. Stalin already looked with some fear at his fourteen-year-old daughter Svetlana, rightly suspecting that the main surprises were yet to come [34].

Sitting in his office in the Kremlin, Stalin, like Lenin, invariably began his working day by watching Pravda. Through the efforts of Stalin, who was actually the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Pravda turned into a party officialdom in which not a single word was printed without a deep semantic load. The only thing was that Pravda had long ago switched to "new speech", and sometimes it was more difficult to decipher some thought embedded in the information than to understand the great meaning of Shiva's revelations. Just in yesterday's Pravda on November 16, another "TASS Denial" was published, where the report of some unnamed American newspaper was indignantly refuted that Japan offered the Soviet Union all of India in exchange for Eastern Siberia.

The meaning of this trick, according to the plan of Joseph Vissarionovich, was: firstly, to make it clear to the Germans that we can take India into our hands without you; secondly, to make it clear to the Germans, the British and the Americans that we have such secret relations with the Japanese that you never dreamed of. And we have someone to redraw the map of the world with, because, as you know, India does not yet belong to Japan, and Japan has long been coveting Eastern Siberia.

The plan for the armed seizure of India by the Red Army has existed since Lenin's time and was drawn up by one of the most brilliant strategists inherited by the Bolsheviks from the "damned" past, General Brusilov.

Comrade Stalin was not surprised by India, just like the Persian Gulf. It was impossible to surprise and seduce too.

Stalin needed Europe, because if it was captured, all these exotic countries would simply have nowhere to go, except for the embrace of the Soviet Union, turning into "brothers forever" according to the methodology of the ideological department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks.

Molotov returned to Moscow with Dekanozov, who presented Stalin with an analytical report from the Soviet embassy in Berlin, prognosticating German policy for the foreseeable future. The report, in particular, stated: "The involvement of the USSR on the side of Germany is the basis of Germany's foreign policy plan, aimed at the quickest victorious end to the war with England."

Stalin asked Molotov and Dekanozov what their opinion was regarding such a withdrawal of our Berlin residency. Since this document came through the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, such a question could not have been asked: both were in complete agreement.

Stalin's mood improved. It was nice to see that Hitler was afraid of him. And he is right to be afraid. Japan is also unlikely to be able to interfere with us.

In general, it will be possible to reach an agreement with both Japan and the United States. But better

most importantly, of course, to pit these countries against each other in the struggle for hegemony in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese, of course, will never defeat America alone, no matter how puffed up they are. But the pampered Americans will never defeat such harsh and ascetic warriors as the Japanese are. And then we'll see which of you to help be the first to become a "Soviet republic." Lenin prophesied back in 1917: "You know that the war between America and Japan is already ready, it has been prepared for decades, it is not accidental; Tactics don't depend on who fires first." And the plan is already almost ready, how to put into practice the next ingenious foresight of the great leader.

It will be better this way.

Then they will not be up to discussing Stalin's actions.

In principle, Stalin decides, there is nothing terrible if we agree to join the three-power pact. On the terms, of course, which Comrade Molotov had already laid out to Hitler and Ribbentrop. But regardless of the German proposals, we must start putting pressure on Bulgaria and Turkey. The entry of troops into Bulgaria and the control of the straits must become the immediate task of our diplomacy. While diplomacy...

Stalin's office efficiency amazed his contemporaries. Mountains of papers, daily delivered from the secretariat and dealing with the most diverse issues in the life of a vast country, always returned either with clear resolutions or in the form of decisions of the Central Committee and Council of People's Commissars.

"Top secret

Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR.

November 5, 1940

On the staffing of schools and schools for pilots of the Red Army Air Force.

To ensure the staffing of schools and schools for pilots of the Red Army Air Force, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR decides:

1. Oblige the Central Council of Osoaviakhim to prepare 20,000 additional pilots for NGOs in the Osoaviakhim system.
2. Oblige the Head of the Main Directorate of the Civil Air Fleet to prepare 10,000 pilots for NGOs in the Civil Air Fleet system ... "

During the First World War, England was forced to curtail its military shipbuilding program for one simple reason: there was no one to complete the new ships for which funds were allocated. There was a lack of trained personnel. And now the Soviet Union faced a similar problem. The gigantic program, which was under the personal control of Comrade Stalin, and therefore strictly carried out, was ready to provide the country's Air Force with 150,000 combat vehicles by the summer of 1941, but there was a catastrophic shortage of pilots.

Stalin, dipping his pen in an inkwell, wrote a resolution: "Vol. Rychagov. Try to find additional reserves. I. Stalin.

Not only pilots were missing. The scale of the deployment of the armed forces in the country

led to the fact that wherever you throw - everywhere there is a shortage of people. In the same way, there are not enough submariners, tank crews - especially drivers, signalmen, military doctors - in almost the entire range of military specialties.

This disgrace occurred due to the local failure to comply with the Decree of the Central Committee of November 1939, where all regional committees, city committees and district committees (rural) of the CPSU (b) were ordered to launch an agitation campaign to replace women with professions traditionally considered male. None of this even made much of a secret. A newsreel flowed through the cinemas of the country: a team of female tunnellers in the mines of Kuzbass and Donbass with picks and jackhammers, young, perky, beautiful, coquettish, although smeared with coal dust.

Stalin especially remembered the plot, how one sweet girl, having risen from the face, changed clothes and went to perform in an amateur ballet troupe. How she fluttered around the stage easily and naturally. He even wanted to invite her to the Kremlin, but forgot to control the affairs. A team of women at the logging site with saws and axes goes to work, taking on increased obligations, and sings the song: "My native country is wide ..." The Volga cargo ship, staffed by women alone from the captain to the cleaning sailor. Stalin even consulted with the sailors: is it possible to replace the crews with women on sea vessels? You can't, they say. At sea, the specifics are different, they will not cope. But there are already sea captains - women. Shchetinina, for example. This is an exception. Lie, probably. Conservatives keep tradition. This issue will need to be dealt with properly. Much easier in the countryside. Women in the field, women on farms, women on tractors. Some women. According to the latest information, in less than 11 months of 1940, 760,000 men under 30 years old were seized from collective farms and state farms without much noise and publicity. Everything seems to be in order here. And in the cities, everything turned out to be sheer window dressing. All these women's steamship, locomotive, mining and lumberjack brigades are pure experiment. Brigades either exist in one copy or do not exist at all. Stalin slips feature films for documentaries. There was even a denunciation that the slaughter girl and the ballerina girl were different people, filmed in completely different places. He brought this to the attention of his comrades. The comrades lowered their eyes, but said firmly: in industry, only unskilled labor can be replaced by women. Skilled workers, Comrade Stalin, need to be trained longer than fighter pilots. "You can shoot me," Shakhurin, People's Commissar for Aviation Industry, told him bluntly, "but I won't give you a single highly qualified worker even in wartime." Of course, it is never too late to shoot him, but Comrade Shakhurin is right.

True, there was also the Gulag as a reserve of labor. Stalin ordered to provide him with a certificate of the presence of prisoners. Beria dragged on with this case for a long time, referring to the fact that Yezhov planted so much - not to figure it out. I had to ask Lavrenty if he would like to take a walk in the Gulag himself and count the prisoners there for ten years. The next day he brought the following:

"GULAG: presence as of 01.11.40 - 3,729,258 people; special camps of the NKVD: presence as of 01.11.40 - 4,475,504 people. Total 8.2 million people. Approximately 2.8 million people are awaiting sentencing, according to your instructions for the order for 1941.

11 million people are sitting in prisons and camps, not participating together with the whole people in the great creative process.

He, Stalin, always considered this abnormal. And despite some resistance from his comrades, he allowed the release of many military men, especially sailors.

The secret operational summary, which, along with the summary figures, provided to him by

Beria, showed, however, that of those in the Gulag, only peasants work, who ended up in the camps mainly under the "seven-eight" law of August 7, 1934 for the theft of socialist property, and hard workers from factories planted for the same plus economic sabotage. They make up the majority of the population of the Gulag, they work hard, many die in a month, but on the whole they fulfill the norm. Article 58 - various chatty intellectuals - works, but it is of little use. Dying, and almost no performance. Of course, working is not just talking. It was necessary to give everyone "ten years without the right to correspond" and not to spend the people's funds on them. A good third of those in the zones are criminals.

These do not work at all - the criminal "law" forbids working. Why keep such people in camps if they don't work anyway? Stalin spoke with Beria, Merkulov and other knowledgeable comrades and decided to conduct a bold social experiment: to offer the criminals to atone for their guilt before the Motherland by serving in the army. Form additional military contingents from them and throw them into battle under the command of camp commanders, who are still enough behind barbed wire. By the way, many criminals have already served in the army, so there will be no big problems with their training. And they will be able to show their criminal habits when communicating with the local population of those countries that will be in the way of the "proletarian battalions".

Some comrades doubted the expediency of such an event. When confronted with open danger, criminals tend to fall into hysterics and panic. And panic is contagious. Nothing, in this case special units of the NKVD will be created, which have already shown themselves well during the winter war with the Finns.

The military, it seems, were not completely convinced, but, of course, they did not dare to object. Moreover, General Meretskov proposed to retrain part of the combined arms personnel to become tankers, pilots, and submariners by replenishing the army with criminals.

The idea seemed promising. But for now, these were all projects. Of course, he remembered the criminals not from a good life. I would gladly do without them, but even Marshal Shaposhnikov explained to him that there is a critical number of those called up for arms - no more than one and a half percent of the able-bodied male population. Otherwise, the industry and the entire economy in general will begin to fall apart. Therefore, it is necessary to create labor reserves no less important than army reserves. Preferably from pre-conscription age, i.e. from teenagers.

Lenin, of course, was smart with his slogan "Study, study and study." Everyone preferred to study, nobody wanted to work. Well, of course, not so that no one. But all this was outrageously given free choice. If you want - go to a university, if you want - to a school (and in recent years they have become visible and invisible for every taste), if you want - to a factory. Of course, they went to the factory last. This practice was so obviously vicious that it could no longer be tolerated. In October 1940, a decree "On State Labor Reserves" was published, and Comrade Stalin was presented with a draft regulation on the creation of a "Main Directorate of Labor Reserves". The Administration must report directly to Comrade Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

1551 educational institutions are transferred to the jurisdiction of the Department. In these establishments, called trade and factory schools, there is a compulsory recruitment of male and female adolescents at the age of 14 years. The project proposed to make such training paid.

With a red pencil, Stalin shredded the project. Education is free, he emphasized twice, adding "in combination with the implementation of production standards." Not only that, it's free

food and uniforms. Stalin had a craving for uniforms no less than Nicholas I. Everyone in the country gradually dressed in a uniform: railroad workers, rivermen, miners, and now teenagers who for many years received the name "artisans".

Stalin was never an idealist and a romantic. He was well aware that the military prison system he had conceived of training "labor reserves" on a forced basis was unlikely to arouse much enthusiasm both among the teenagers themselves and their parents. Therefore, he personally wrote in the same red pencil: "To provide for criminal liability for evasion and escape", clearly making it clear that he considers the entire system of "labor reserves" as a dressing room for the GULAG and the Red Army. And marked - 10 years. Everyone will understand this.

"Top secret"

"Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) On the song vols. Frenkel and Pokrass
"Accept us, beautiful Suomi".

... Temporarily, until further notice, stop performing on the radio, from the stages and in the ranks of the song vols. Frenkel and Pokrass "Take us, Suomi-beauty ..."

Stalin crossed out the words "remove from song books" in the decree, wrote a resolution: "Until August 1941" [35].

"Top secret.

Decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the Temporary Withdrawal of the Couplet of the Song from the Film "If Tomorrow is War".

... Temporarily, until further notice, stop performing on the radio, from the movie screen, from the stages and in the ranks of the next verse of Comrade Frenkel's song from the movie "If there is war tomorrow":

"Who threatens our Motherland with war,

He will fight with the whole country.

Only the fascist will touch the native land,

Any tractor driver will become a tanker."

"Top secret.

Decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the temporary removal of the word "samurai" from the song "Three Tankmen" in the film "Tractor Drivers".

... Temporarily, until further notice, replace the words "samurai" in the song "Three Tankers" in the movie "Tractor Drivers" with the words "enemy flock" and only perform in this form

song on the radio, from the movie screen, from the stages and in the ranks, as well as to make appropriate corrections in the songbooks.

The arrival of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Matsuoka, was expected, on which great hopes were pinned.

"Top secret.

Decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the temporary suspension of the performance of Comrade Kogan's song "We will still reach the Ganges."

... Temporarily, until further notice, stop performing on the radio, from the stages and in the ranks, and also to exclude Comrade Kogan's song from the songbooks:

"And we will still reach the Ganges,

and we still die in battles,

So that from Japan to England

my Motherland shone!"

A good member of the Komsomol Comrade Kogan. And after all, he did not compose this song in 1918, but in 1940. Stalin sighed and imposed a resolution: "Until August 1941."

Internal affairs, forcing him to constantly keep abreast of a huge country, not missing a single book without his knowledge (some brave writers send him manuscripts, wanting to have Stalin and only him as their editor), not a single film or theater premiere, not a single song and any music, take up a lot of time.

But this is only a part (and an insignificant part) of the activity of the leader of all peoples. He knows by name the collegiums of all the people's commissariats, and when it is necessary to "eliminate" not only the people's commissar himself, but also any head of the head office, department, department, and even sector, Comrade Stalin personally gives instructions on who one or another can (and should) be replaced.

He knows by sight and by name all the designers of new weapons, knows what they do and what each of them promised to create, in what quantity and in what time frame.

He knows by sight the entire leadership of the NKVD and NPOs, and in the general staff - everyone down to the operators.

He, perhaps, alone in the country (and throughout the world, of course) knows not only pseudonyms, but also the real names (with true biographies) of all Soviet foreign agents operating under the NKVD, GRU and NKID.

There are things that no one knows about yet, except for Comrade Stalin, because he thinks globally and for many years to come.

Recently, Beria and Merkulov received an order to deploy a whole network of new concentration

camps, and everyone in the Lubyanka internally shrank from the premonition of a new wave of mass terror. Shrank because not a single wave passed them. But this time, Stalin was thinking about a problem that in 1940 no one had not only thought about, but had not even imagined that such questions could be posed even in the form of a problematic. And the question was very difficult: what to do with the population of Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, Spain, Romania, Hungary, and what else is there in Europe? Approximately a third was supposed to be liquidated, a third - to be re-educated on the spot, and a third - to be re-educated in the USSR. Re-educate by labor in Siberia, the Arctic and Northern Kazakhstan. The task was so global that only Poskrebyshev knew about it so far. The rest will find out in due time" [36].

There were questions that for the time being were not even trusted by the "Special Folder" of the Politburo. The "special folder" is the highest level of secrecy that exists in the Soviet Union, and it was to this folder that Stalin moved, having done away with petty matters [37].

"Special folder.

From November 10, 1940

Secret resolution of the Politburo

On the transfer, in order to help the German side, of clichés and technology for the manufacture of banknotes of British pounds sterling ... "

From the very beginning of the war, the Germans were seized with the idea of arranging the production of counterfeit pounds. But even German pedantry and accuracy did not help. There was no experience. The Germans were engaged in this difficult task with the SD (VIth Directorate of the RSHA of Walter Schellenberg), which, through the "NKVD-SS Friendship Society" [38] created in January 1940, turned to the USSR for "technical assistance". Stalin hesitated for a while, and then decided to allow it. Let them indulge. Either way, we will win. The Germans will succeed: let them once again make sure that we do not hide anything from them and help in any way we can. Moreover, undermining the British economy is also not bad at all. Anyway, we'll take it all back soon. And if at the same time you tell the British in secret what the Germans are doing bad things, then in general there will be combinations that are simply a sin not to use.

Stalin imposed a resolution: "Vol. Malenkov. Take control." Today, there was nothing else in the Special Folder, and Stalin turned to studying the intelligence report. The reports were presented to Stalin in three folders - from the NKVD, from the GRU and in a green folder, where a modest inscription was imprinted: "Secretariat of the Central Committee." The last folder contained information from sources who personally reported information to the leader.

Intelligence reports did not report, in principle, anything sensational. Basically there was a compilation of undercover messages that spoke about the preparation of the Germans for the final crush of England.

In all but one. Stalin turned purple. In public, he rarely let his emotions run wild, but here, sitting alone in his office, he allowed himself to swear loudly.

From distant Tokyo, Richard Sorge reported in a cipher dated November 18 that Hitler had conceived and was implementing a plan to attack the Soviet Union. There were no details in the message.

Richard Sorge was exposed back in 1938 as a double agent working for the NKVD and in the service of Walter Schellenberg. In general, the life of an illegal immigrant does not lend itself to a clear analysis. It is very difficult to understand whether his work for the Germans is a cover for work for the USSR, or vice versa.

However, Soviet intelligence officers managed to obtain copies of materials sent by Sorge to the Germans regarding the situation in the Far East and the USSR's plans for Japan. In the materials, every word was true. Sorge was a communist and a member of the NSDAP at the same time. The party card of the VPK(b) was kept at the Lubyanka, and he wore a gold party badge with a swastika on the lapel of his jacket. With doubles, you always need to keep an eye out, because they themselves sometimes may not realize that they are doubles. Even Dzerzhinsky warned that a scout who had been abroad for a long time becomes a victim of the so-called "ideological intoxication" and, without realizing it, begins to work for the enemy with even greater zeal than for his own. Therefore, iron Felix believed, scouts, even the most valuable ones, should be recalled home from time to time and dipped into the real values of socialism. Since the expression "real values of socialism" was an element of "new language", Stalin, constantly checking his path with the "classics", translated this expression as "plant and liquidate", starting with Dzerzhinsky himself.

In 1937-38, as you know, dozens of scouts were recalled to Moscow, and the one who got off with 20 years of camps was happy. Most of them were shot. The smartest ones went over to the enemy. As for Sorge, since it was proved that he was a "double", that is, he was used by the Germans as a channel for transmitting disinformation, they decided to touch him for the time being. After all, it is always interesting to find out what the enemy is trying to convince you of.

But they did not have time to make such a decision, as the comrades who penetrated the holy of holies of British intelligence reported that Sorge, it turns out, was also working for the British. Still on the British or primarily on the British? This question was too complicated, and it was already too difficult to distinguish in Sorge's reports where there was German disinformation, and where - English. Therefore, so that he would not fool anyone in Moscow, a new decision was made: to recall him to Moscow and shoot him. But Sorge did not return to Moscow, but continued to supply the NKVD with information with enviable constancy, although he had long been listed in this office as "dismissed" [39].

Stalin imposed a resolution on the message from Tokyo: "Vol. comrades Merkulov and Fitin. Finally figure out who this guy is working for?!"

On the same day, November 19, without sending any reply to the Germans yet, Stalin ordered to send to the Bulgarians something like an ultimatum, drawn up in the mildest possible tones, where it was proposed, as usual, to conclude a treaty "on friendship and mutual assistance" on the model of the infamous treaties with the Baltic countries. The Soviet Union asked to station a part of the Red Army on Bulgarian territory, deploy a naval base of the Black Sea Fleet in Varna, and all this in exchange for financial, economic and, of course, military assistance "in the event of an attack on Bulgaria by a third power or a group of powers." As always, making yet another sacrifice, Moscow swore to Sophia that the proposed treaty "will in no way affect the existing regime (monarchist! –

I. B.), the independence and sovereignty of Bulgaria".

Relations between Russia and Bulgaria have always been complicated. Ever since the time when Russia laid down a hundred thousand of its soldiers to create the Bulgarian state. Diplomatic relations were constantly torn, and in the First World War, it was Bulgaria that made a laughingstock of all the ideas of Russian-Serbian pan-Slavism, entering the war against Russia on the side of Germany. Relations deteriorated even more after the Bolshevik coup,

when Bulgaria became almost the main country that gave shelter to the White Army retreating from Russia, becoming the object of the most vicious attacks from the Soviet regime and the arena of all kinds of provocations from the Comintern.

Alas, it was not the autumn of 1939 and not even the summer of 1940. The year 1941 was already approaching, and Stalin's methods were well known in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, to work just as well as a year ago. The four months taken by the Finns turned out to be

irreplaceable.

On November 20, Stalin held a meeting attended by Molotov, Dekanozov, Beria, Merkulov and Fitin. Pavel Fitin was selected by the credentials committee of the Central Committee for leadership in the NKVD in 1939, when a good half of the staff positions in the Lubyanka turned out to be vacant. Now Beria and Merkulov recommended him for the post of head of the Foreign Department of the NKVD (foreign intelligence). Before him, this position was occupied by Dekanozov, but since Stalin was pleased to use Dekanozov first in the administrative field (bringing Lithuania into a state common to all Soviet republics), and then in the diplomatic field, the INO NKVD remained without a boss for quite a long time.

Stalin, as a rule, resolved organizational issues quickly, but then he dragged something out, causing both Molotov and Beria some anxiety. But everything worked out. Stalin quickly approved both appointments on behalf of the Politburo: Dekanozov as ambassador to Germany, Fitin as head of the INO NKVD. Everyone's heart was relieved, for it was evident that the leader was in a very good mood.

Dekanozov was the first of the former heads of foreign intelligence to receive the status of "Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary". His main task, according to Stalin, was to restore good and reliable intelligence information from the very heart of Germany - Berlin. Therefore, at this stage, he must in every possible way emphasize Moscow's friendly attitude towards Berlin and collect information about Hitler's plans [40].

The main thing is to find out the exact date of the beginning of the landing on the British Isles, warning Moscow about this in advance in order to "carry out events known to you."

Comrade Fitin, Stalin pointed out, should make every effort to restore our intelligence network in Germany. Primarily in Germany at this stage. And in all other countries. A similar directive was given at the end of 1939 - the leader looked reproachfully at those present - but things are moving slowly, without a twinkle.

Everyone present suppressed a sigh. In the 30s, even before Hitler came to power, the then head of the INO (still under the GPU) Artur Artuzov covered Germany with such a web of his agents that, if there was a need to seize Germany then (i.e., be the Soviet Union then ready for this), Germany, right in the grip of this web, would have been presented to Comrade Stalin. But, alas. Artuzov was shot with all his employees, residents and most of the agents. A brilliant resident in Germany, Boris Gordon, was recalled to Moscow and shot without trial or investigation by decision of the OSO. New residents tried to maintain contact with the German agents, but they were either shot, or planted, or are still missing. Moreover, all employees of the INO central apparatus who were engaged in Germany were shot. File cabinets, secret files, ciphers, appearances, addresses either disappeared or were brought into such a chaotic state that most of the agents could not be restored ...

The fulfillment of the tasks set by Stalin turned out to be no easy task, like any task of resurrection from the ashes. From September 5, 1939, Amayak Kobulov was appointed head of the residency in Berlin - an inexperienced person in intelligence, and besides, he was absurd and

slandorous. He got to this position under the patronage of his older brother Bogdan Kobulov, one of Beria's deputies. Although no one, including Stalin himself, had any doubts about Amayak's boundless devotion to Comrade Stalin, there were no illusions about his business qualities in Moscow, even Beria and his brother Bogdan, forbidding him to personally meet with agents and sending him an experienced and capable intelligence officer as his deputy Alexander Korotkov. Alexander Korotkoe, having documents in the name of Alexander Erdberg, began to restore the agent network, starting with one of the key informants - Arvid Harnack, known under the nickname "Corsican". However, a signal came to Moscow at that time that during the "pause", while Moscow was reveling in its own blood, the Gestapo had identified and recruited most of the former Soviet agents. In particular, Harnack himself, who was already under suspicion because he was born in the United States and was married to an American of German origin, who once led a circle for the study of the works of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

At the end of October 1940, Korotkov was called to Moscow, having received an order to temporarily freeze all communications. At present, he was still in Moscow, delving into archives, where operational reports about Harnack, his entourage, their connections were still preserved, and there was a possibility of filtering these connections by the German security service and military counterintelligence. The task is also formulated for him: to find out the position and role of the forces opposed to the Nazi regime; check and, if confirmed, detail information about Hitler's military plans for the USSR; find out the structure and organization of the German economic administration in wartime, economic calculations regarding the means of waging war, especially in the event of its prolongation and expansion, the provision of Germany with strategic raw materials and food.

Fitin reported all this to Stalin, encouraged by the leader's benevolent nods. Contrary to his habit of pacing around the office during reports, Stalin sat at the table, listened attentively, sucking on an extinct pipe, he especially liked that in the task formulated by the Berlin residency, the question of the possibility of war between the USSR and Germany was completely bypassed. No scout was supposed to know such things. They only spoke of the need to find out what Germany would do in the event of a "prolongation and expansion of the war."

Further, the leader listened to the message of Beria and Merkulov regarding the separation of the State Security Department from the NKVD into a separate People's Commissariat with the appointment of Merkulov as People's Commissar.

Stahl knew Vsevolod Merkulov well [41]. He came to the "bodies" in 1921 and until 1931 worked for ten years in succession in the Cheka, the GPU and the OGPU. Then Merkulov was transferred to "party work" in Georgia and in 1938 became Beria's first deputy, who brought him to Moscow. The main task of Merkulov, like many of his colleagues, was to survive, or rather, to survive in those inhuman conditions in which all special services worked in Stalin's time. And not only the special services. The easiest way to survive (but by no means guaranteed) was to follow the simple rule of "guess, please, survive." Stalin liked one speech by Merkulov at the top of the state security investigators, where he said: "Sooner or later there will be a fight between the communist bear and the Western bulldog. Our healthy, socially strong, young idea, the idea of Lenin-Stalin, will emerge victorious from this fight!" Stalin liked Merkulov, who, as follows from the description, combined great kindness to the people and almost bestial cruelty to his enemies. The fact that Merkulov smoked 40 cigarettes a day (two packs) also spoke in his favor. An avid smoker himself, Stalin knew that he smokes a lot who gives himself to the cause without a trace, burning in the name of an idea. In addition, Merkulov was known as an intellectual. Stalin was once brought a script written by him from collective farm life. The leader found it somewhat primitive, but superbly ideologically consistent. Not to mention the fact that asking for the chair of the People's Commissar of State Security, knowing how all your predecessors ended up, even without being People's Commissars,

you need to have enough courage.

Lavrenty, we must give him his due, knows how to select people. Let him work in such a responsible position. This was the first experience of dividing the huge monster of the NKVD into two people's commissariats: internal affairs and state security. According to the staff of the new people's commissariat, the "foreign department" turned into a "foreign department", which had long been talked about. In fact, the army has an Intelligence Directorate, and the Chekists have a department. Some kind of discrimination. Stalin considered the claims of his comrades fair and promised to quickly resolve these issues.

Then Molotov reported to him that an answer to the Germans was being prepared, but he believed that there was no need to hurry with the answer. In any case, until the response of the Bulgarians and Turks to our "proposals." Great diplomatic activity of the Germans in the Balkans is noted. Hungary just today joined the Axis countries. The Bulgarians and Yugoslavs are processed most intensively.

Looking carefully at his counterintelligence officers and diplomats, Stalin asked: was there any leak of our plans in Germany and elsewhere?

Such a narrow circle of people is devoted to the Thunderstorm plan, - Beria reassured the leader, - that no leak is simply impossible. With the expansion of the number of those initiated into the plan, a leak will be inevitable. In England, Stalin remarked, certain circles are sure that the action of the Soviet Union against Germany is inevitable. Where do they get this confidence from? Is there a leak going there? Understand.

At all the meetings of intelligence officers and diplomats that took place in the presence of Stalin, people had confidence that the leader knew much more than those who headed the intelligence and counterintelligence services. This suggested that Stalin had his own intelligence and information service, reporting to him personally and so disguised in his apparatus that no one knew anything about it.

On November 21, Stalin held a meeting with the military, summoning Timoshenko, Meretskov and Golikov. The day before, the leader requested from the "Special Folder" the "Thunderstorm" plan, sent to him for approval in September 1940, when any minute the expected German landing in England caused some commotion in the Soviet headquarters. Some proposed to strike only at the Balkans, and on the line of confrontation with the Germans - to wait for Hitler's reaction. Others believed that if we start on October 1, then globally: with a simultaneous strike in both the southern and central directions. All these shirks led to the fact that the "Thunderstorm" plan, as it were, was divided into two plans. One involved actions

only in the Balkans, and the second - against the Germans in Poland and East Prussia. The general plan, which provided for actions in two strategic directions, was somehow slurred. In fact, the old sad story was repeated, dating back as far as 1914, when the general plan of tsarist Russia, as a result of many years of planning, also fell apart. One - provided for actions

only against Austria-Hungary, the other - only against Germany, which led to a breakdown in the general mobilization plan and the plan for strategic deployment and made itself felt constantly until the complete collapse of Russia in the last world war. Stalin once again carefully read the document:

September 18, 1940 No. 103202/06

TOP SECRET

VERY IMPORTANT

"People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR

PERSONAL ONLY

Central Committee of the CPSU (b) comrade. STALIN comrade. MOLOTOV

I am reporting for your consideration the action plan of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in the West and in the East for 1940 and 1941..."

Stalin's gaze quickly runs over the lines of a familiar document:

"...On our western borders, Germany will be the most likely enemy..."

Stalin winced. What does it mean: "The most likely enemy will be Germany"? Who else? Sweden? He suppressed a flash of irritation. The document was drawn up in September, when the ideology was still alive that the Soviet Union would never start a war before someone dared to encroach on its sacred borders. Stalin became more and more convinced that such an ideology was not only harmful and dangerous, but completely inappropriate for the current moment. He has already given instructions to Mekhlis and Rogov at GLAVPUR, as well as to other bodies, to change ideological work among the masses in general, and primarily in the army. To prepare the people and the country for war, moreover, for an "offensive, aggressive and devastating" war.

The leader's mood improved somewhat when, having made his way through the vaguely drafted preamble and the too detailed description of the corps and divisions deployed to carry out the plan, Stalin moved on to a specific and more understandable (after all, he was not a military man!) For him part of the document.

"The main forces of the Red Army in the West, depending on the situation, can be deployed either south of Brest-Litovsk, in order to cut off Germany from the Balkans with a powerful blow in the directions of Lublin and Krakow, and further to Breslau (Bratislav) countries, deprive it of its most important economic bases, and decisively influence the Balkan countries in matters of their participation in the war; or north of Brest-Litovsk with the task of defeating the main forces of the German army within East Prussia and capturing the latter.

The final decision to deploy will depend on the political situation that will develop by the start of the war; in peacetime conditions, I consider it necessary to have both options developed.

The first option is deployment south of Brest-Litovsk.

... In cooperation with the left-flank army of the Western Front, inflict decisive

the defeat of the Lublin-Sandomierz enemy grouping and reach the river. Wisla. In the future, strike in the general direction on Kielce, Krakow and go to the river. Pilica and the upper course of the river. Oder...

When deploying the Armed Forces of the USSR according to this basic variant, the following grouping is proposed.

Deploy three fronts directly in the West - North-Western, Western and South-Western.

North-Western Front - the main tasks.

Firmly cover the Minsk and Riga-Pskov direction and

under no circumstances should the Germans invade our territory.

In cooperation with the 3rd Army of the Western Front, capture the area of Seina, Suwalki and go to the Shitkemen, Filipovo, Rachki front.

With a blow in the general direction to Insterburg, Alenstein, together with the Western Front, to tie down the German forces in East Prussia ...

The Western Front is the main task.

... Simultaneous blow in the general direction of Alenshtein to tie down the German forces in East Prussia. With the transition of the armies of the South-Western Front to the offensive with a strike of the left-flank army in the general direction of Ivangorod, to help the South-Western Front to break the enemy's Lublin grouping and, further developing the operation on Radom, to ensure the operations of the South-Western Front from the North ...

Southwestern Front - the main tasks.

... In cooperation with the 4th Army of the Western Front, inflict a decisive defeat on the Lublin-Sandomierz enemy grouping and reach the river. Wisla.

In the future, strike in the direction of Kalce, Petrokov and Krakow, capture the area of Kielce, Petrokov and reach the river. Pilica and the upper course of the river. Oder.

As part of the front, have 6 armies - 5, 19, 6, 12, 18 and 9th ...

PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONER OF DEFENSE OF THE USSR

Marshal of the Soviet Union

(S. TIMOSHENKO)

CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

army General

(K. MERETSKOV)

September 18, 1940 [42]

WRITTEN IN ONE COPY

Executor - Deputy Head of Operational Department

Major General Vasilevsky.

After some confusion caused by such a rapid collapse of France and the evacuation of British troops from the continent, it became necessary to further increase the power of the armed forces in order to maintain on the western borders such a balance of forces that would make it possible for our decisive victory in the event of an offensive, and on the other hand guaranteed that the enemy will never attack us. The minimum such ratio of forces was to be an average of three to one, and for some types of weapons five or more to one.

This led to the need for a sharp increase in intensity in "carrying out the necessary defense measures." Translated from modern speech into human language, this meant that if on January 1, 1940 the size of the Red Army was 2,013,400 people, then by the end of the same 1940, i.e. today, it already stands at 4,209,000, doubling in a year, making it possible to revise the figures presented in the 18 September strategic deployment plan.

Timoshenko brought Stalin his order No. 0328 for a visa, dated just today: November 21, 1940 "On the training of commanding officers of the reserve in 1941 in the military units", which, along with other events of this kind, made it possible to increase the number by mid-1941 army up to 5,500,000 people. From the moment the day came for the start of "Operation Thunderstorm", official mobilization of several ages was announced, bringing the size of the army to 8 million people by September 1941. The new order of the People's Commissar of Defense provided for military certification of literally everyone: from nurses and paramedics to writers and poets.

The Chief of the General Staff drew Stalin's attention to the fact that practically no demobilization of persons who had served their terms was carried out in the armed forces. This fact, of course, is positive, but it cannot be hidden. True, the motivation is to increase the service life, but those who have served all the terms are not allowed to go home.

"It can't go on like this for a long time," Meretskov stressed, "there is nowhere to house people, not even enough tents. It would be half the trouble, but there are also not enough training facilities: classes, training grounds, training detachments, which, although they are expanding, are far from being at the same pace as

"This will not last long," the leader assured, glancing meaningfully at the commanders. The hint was clear. "Here we'll spend the winter," Stalin promised, sucking on his pipe.

And at the same time he asked Golikov why the Germans also behave somehow not very actively. What can the head of the GRU report on their plans?

Golikov informed Stalin that the Germans not only had not weakened, but were constantly intensifying their air attack on England. Moreover, by all indicators it is clear that the resistance of the British is weakening.

Golikov further admitted that there had been some increase in German divisions in East Prussia and Poland. If there were 37, now there are 45. The transfer of German troops to Finland and, in smaller numbers, to Romania continues. But, the head of the GRU stressed, according to available data, the Greeks are preparing a major offensive against the Italians in Albania, threatening to destroy 37 Italian divisions. We must also expect the passage of a large group

German troops through the territories of Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

- What are you offering? Stalin asked.

Although Stalin addressed Golikov, Meretskov replied. He drew the leader's attention to the fact that large groups of German troops would march through the Balkans, exposing themselves to a flank attack.

The leader promised to keep all this in mind, hiding behind his usual phrase about the need to "consult with comrades." And Golikov was ordered to state everything that was said in a memorial note.

The head of the GRU did not have time to write a note.

The very next day, November 22, a message came that the Greeks had broken through the Italian front.

Stalin learned this news while at the Bolshoi Theater, where on that day Wagner's opera *Valkyrie* was staged by Eisenstein. The role of Sieglinde was performed by Ludmila Spiller, who, judging by the gossip circulating in Moscow, was the passion of Comrade Molotov himself. The staging of *The Valkyrie* at the Bolshoi Theater was a tentative step towards establishing closer contacts with the Germans. The opera was timed to coincide with Wagner Week in Germany. Despite the multilateral ties between the USSR and Germany, there were absolutely no cultural contacts. There was not even a mere exchange of films. The only action in the field of culture was the prohibition by Stalin of the demonstration in the USSR of Chaplin's film "The Great Dictator" according to the presentation made by the German

embassy.

Stalin decided to develop cultural contacts with the Germans, hoping to send several deep educational films like "Battleship Potemkin" to the German distribution. But, of course, it was necessary to start not with an armadillo, but with Wagner. Stalin called Eisenstein and instructed the famous director to stage *The Valkyrie* in some unusual way in order to attract the attention of the Germans and ask for a tour in Berlin.

Eisenstein, on reflection, decided to use the pantomime effect to better emphasize the passions tormenting Sigmund. Almost all employees of the German embassy were invited to the premiere. Contrary to expectations, they did not like the performance at all. The Germans considered all of Eisenstein's innovations "Jewish tricks deliberately introduced into the opera in order to desecrate the masterpiece of the great Master."

"He is a Lutheran," Stalin laughed when he was told about this.

Chapter 9

Hitler learned about the beginning of the Greek offensive, leaving his cinema, where he watched the film "Uncle Kruger" that had just been shot. The film was dedicated to the legendary President of the Transvaal Republic, Paul Kruger, who valiantly resisted the colonial appetites of England at the turn of the past and present centuries. The essence of the film was that it was impossible to negotiate with the British. They must be destroyed, or any people will suffer the fate of the Boers.

Despite the triumphant victories of the Wehrmacht, the mood of the people was gloomy - and not only because the first British bombs had already fallen on German cities. More than half of the population of the Reich remembered the last war and, most importantly, remembered how it began and how it ended. Hitler's reckless promises to end the war this year with a victorious landing in England clearly did not come true, and the war more and more made itself felt.

Already in the winter of 1939, there was a shortage of coal and basic foodstuffs in all cities. The coming winter also did not bode well.

Therefore, Hitler, acutely feeling the dumb question from his people, when it all ends, was internally worried, because he already perfectly understood that everything would not end very soon and, most likely, would not bring anything good to Germany again.

He frantically searched for a way out of the situation.

The best outcome would be peace with England. He already offered it twice and spat in his face twice.

A military alliance with Stalin... He proposed it openly. Offered out of fear of the huge Stalinist army, hoping to gain time by promising Stalin what, in his opinion, the Moscow dictator wanted most of all. But in the course of preparing for the Berlin meeting with Molotov, he convinced himself that a real alliance with Stalin could solve all his current problems. The accession of the USSR with its inexhaustible human and material resources to the Axis powers would show England (and the United States as well) that the continuation of the war is very dangerous and that some kind of agreement must be reached.

He waited for an answer from Moscow every day. But there was no answer.

The catastrophe of the Duce army in eastern Albania again reminded Hitler of the malicious uncompromisingness of the British, who were ready to fight him as much as they wanted (even longer than with Napoleon), just to win the last battle in this war as well.

Thrown into the sea near Dunkirk, the British again came from the sea, this time from the Mediterranean, landing on Crete, on Lemnos and in Greece itself. They received air bases there, from which they could easily reach the precious oil reserves of the Ploestine basin.

Day and night, convoys go to the Mediterranean through the Atlantic and Gibraltar, through the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal.

Hitler already caught himself thinking that every minute he expected some new dirty trick from English.

The Fuhrer's fears were constantly fanned by Admiral Raeder. He literally followed Hitler, arguing that the fate of the British Empire should not be decided in the battle over England, which, from the point of view of the commander-in-chief of the fleet, has not yet yielded any significant results, but in the Mediterranean Sea, which is the core of the entire British imperial system. Back in 1939, the General Staff developed a major operation "South-East". This plan provided for the invasion of German troops into the Middle East and further into Central Asia and India. The operation was just planned for the end of 1940 - the beginning of 1941. Isn't it time to start implementing it?

"Indeed, my Fuhrer," the admiral insisted, "we will not only block the Suez Canal, but we will acquire the richest oil regions (which the Fuhrer has already promised Stalin) and will not be so acutely dependent on Romanian oil. In addition, a blow in this direction will inevitably throw Turkey into our arms, and the whole Russian problem will take on a completely different

turn when we reach the borders of Transcaucasia from the south.

Hitler listened attentively to the Grand Admiral without interrupting. He even decided, despite his wounded pride, to once again turn to Franco and convince him to take Gibraltar. From General Halder, who had come to him with eastern plans, Hitler brushed off again, sending him to Jodl for instructions. The generals discussed the situation on the Italo-Greek front, noting the plight of the Italian troops and the general depression in Italy due to the setbacks in Greece. The Fuehrer really wants rapprochement with Bulgaria, Romania and Finland. Unfortunately, Tsar Boris is very slow to answer about joining the Axis, being under strong pressure from the Russians. Moscow wants to draw it into its orbit like the Baltics and Bessarabia.

– By the same methods? Halder is interested.

“Perhaps even cooler,” Jodl explains, “if we continue to pander to Moscow.

“For more than a month now,” reminds Halder, “I have not been able to report anything to the Fuhrer on the preparation of a plan for waging war in the east. This puts the developers in a very difficult position, because they do not know the opinion of the head of state.

- Yes, - Jodl agrees, - the operation against Russia, apparently, is relegated to the background. The Fuhrer once got excited, but now he wants to negotiate with Stalin more than to quarrel with him somehow.

“But this,” reminds Halder again, “will once again postpone the Russian operation for an indefinite time.

Jodl shrugs.

- The Führer is not inclined to do anything against Stalin, but is more inclined to act in alliance with him.

“Yes,” Halder agrees again, “the Führer is not inclined. And Stalin? Is he inclined or not to give us a blow from which we will never recover? He's just waiting for us to turn our backs on him in the west or south.

“You exaggerate, dear Franz,” Jodl smiles, “Stalin is a reasonable enough person not to do this, at least until our landing in England. And since, as you well know, there will be no landing, he will not attack us. He is a pragmatist to the core. To be honest, I'm more afraid of America's performance. Here there is a danger of a simultaneous action of America and Russia against us. Therefore, while America is swinging, it is necessary to knock England out of the war. The capture of Gibraltar and the defeat of the English army in Egypt may be those fatal blows that Britain will not withstand.

- What forces are going to smash the British in Egypt? Halder is wary.

“By the forces of Marshal Graziani,” Jodl explains calmly. “His army is three times the size of the English in the theatre. The Fuhrer has already pressed the Duce. He swore that Graziani would soon go on the offensive.

In the following days, orders poured into the General Staff to prepare operational documents for Operations Marita (occupation of all of Greece), Operation Felix (capture of Gibraltar), Operation Isabella (occupation of Portugal). However, along with the Italians

and the Spaniards to joint action for the final expulsion of the British from the Mediterranean, the Fuhrer tried to inspire France as well.

Work boiled over.

The General Staff received a demand to strengthen the coastal defenses of Spain.

It was necessary to take care of the concentration of German troops in Italian ports for boarding transport. The transport, fortunately, turned out to be former German, stuck there after the start of the war.

It was necessary to think about which engineer battalions to allocate for the capture of the English stronghold. About many other little things that require the planning of a large combined operation.

While these events were taking place, the long-awaited response came from Moscow to the proposal made by Hitler on November 18, inviting the homeland of the Comintern to join the Anti-Comintern Pact.

"Urgently! Top secret!

To the Imperial Foreign Minister in person!

No. 2362 of 25 November. Received November 26, 1940-08:50

Molotov invited me to his place this evening and, in the presence of Dekanozov, stated the following:

The Soviet government studied the content of the statement made by the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs during the final conversation on November 13, and took the following position:

The Soviet government is ready to accept the draft Four Powers Pact on political cooperation and mutual economic assistance ... on the following terms:

1. It is envisaged that German troops will immediately leave Finland, which, under the 1939 treaty, is included in the Soviet zone of influence ...
2. It is envisaged that in the coming months the security of the Soviet Union from the straits is guaranteed by the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact between the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, as well as by the construction of a base for the ground and naval forces of the USSR in the area of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles on the terms of a long-term lease.
3. It is envisaged that the zone south of Batumi and Baku in the general direction towards the Persian Gulf is recognized as the center of the territorial aspirations of the Soviet Union.

... The protocol should indicate that if Turkey refuses to join the Four Power Pact, Italy and the USSR will jointly develop and practically apply military and diplomatic sanctions.

In addition, it is necessary to agree on a third secret protocol between Germany and the Soviet Union regarding Finland.

Schulenburg".

Hitler, after listening to Ribbentrop's report and rather briefly reviewing Moscow's response to his proposals to divide the world in general and the ownerless property of the British Empire in particular, asked his foreign minister:

- What did he cling to Finland and Bulgaria? Is he going to land in England himself and drive the British out of the Mediterranean?

All the Fuehrer's thoughts were occupied with Operation Felix, which presented such a golden opportunity to squash the British with a few short but powerful blows.

"Unfortunately, my Fuhrer," Ribbentrop answered diplomatically, "there have been no changes in Moscow's position during these two weeks. They agree to join the Axis, but only on certain conditions, as usual.

"They agreed to sign a non-aggression pact with us," Hitler said peevishly, "in exchange for the division of Poland, the absorption of the Baltic states, Bessarabia and Bukovina. Now they agree to join the Axis in exchange for the final capture of Finland and Bulgaria. Take a look at the map and you will see Cannes that no one has seen yet. In the north, it goes to the border of Norway, in the south - to the border of Yugoslavia and Greece, then it annexes Turkey and goes to the border with Iraq.

Ribbentrop was silent.

"So let this vile extortionist," Hitler continued with a shrill note in his voice, "go to hell. We can do without him. He seems to want to take over the whole world without firing a single shot!

"We can do without him!" - it was said strongly, but obviously in a temper. Almost 80% of all materials enabling Germany to continue the war are supplied from the USSR. About which Ribbentrop allowed himself to respectfully remind.

- But, my Fuhrer, Stalin behaves impeccably. I mean contract deliveries. It is unlikely that he would have supplied us with everything we needed if he had hatched against us any not

very honest plans.

Hitler, who, during Ribbentrop's indecently long monologue, paced his office with frightening speed - a sure sign that he was about to start yelling, spraying saliva, suddenly fell into an armchair, sat for a while with his eyes closed, then said wearily:

"You are right, Ribbentrop. I'll think about it.

- And what will we answer to Moscow? the Reichsminister dared to ask.

"I will tell you when the time is right. So far, nothing. We have been waiting for their response for a long time. Let them wait too.

All Hitler's thoughts are directed to the Mediterranean Sea, and if someone tries to distract them, then Admiral Raeder, who for the first time managed to push the generals out of the Fuhrer into the background, quickly returns him to the Mediterranean noose, so simple and beautiful as a work of art, in which cursed Albion will suffocate.

Hitler asked what the grand admiral thought about the fact that in the midst of our operations in the Mediterranean, Stalin would strike us with a treacherous stab in the back.

"Never," Raeder declared with conviction, "he will not do that, my Fuhrer. He is quite a reasonable person. Now he is modernizing his fleet and largely depends on us in obtaining new types of naval weapons.

Hitler was silent.

Operation Felix again ran into Franco's stubbornness and Petain's insanity. Franco became capricious, like a prince of the blood. In response to all the arguments about achieving a quick and almost bloodless victory over England, he again declared that no exact date could be fixed for Spain's entry into the war.

And what does Petain allow himself? He

flatly refused to allow German troops to pass through the territory of southern France controlled by the Vichy government. Moreover, he behaved so arrogantly, as if it was 1918, and not 1940, and it was not the Germans who were marching in Paris, but the French in Berlin. The old man was hinted that he would force the Fuhrer to occupy the rest of France as well. Such a plan had already been developed and had the code name "Attila", but had not yet been signed by the Fuhrer. The passage of the Germans through the territory of Vichy, the French explained, could lead to an uprising of the garrisons of North Africa and their transition to the side of de Gaulle. As far as we know, the Germans foresee such a possibility and, as a response, again assume the occupation of southern France. So weigh what suits you best, but in any case, you will give the British a powerful enough ally just behind the lines of the Italian army. There was something to think about.

The Fuhrer personally consulted with the Duce and Count Ciano, who occupies two positions at once: Mussolini's son-in-law and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hitler demanded that Italian aircraft operate day and night over the Mediterranean Sea, preventing the British from behaving there, as in their home pool. And hurry up with the displacement of the British from Egypt beyond the Suez Canal. Ciano stated that it would be good to do so at the same time as the German invasion of Greece. Here Hitler exploded and yelled that he warned Chianov's father-in-law (he put it this way: "Chiananoschwiegervater") against any adventures on the continent. Perhaps the count forgot that Germany does not have a common border with Greece, and in order to reach it, German troops will have to pass through the territory of three countries: Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. And it remains to be seen whether they will agree to let the Wehrmacht through their territories and whether they will have to fight their way to the aid of the Duce with battles and losses. And this will inevitably divert his forces from preparing for the main and decisive battle of the entire war - the landing in England. This landing could have been carried out long ago if it were not for the criminal inaction of the Italian fleet. His vile cowardice and unwillingness to fight!

Ciano, accustomed to Hitler's heightened emotionality, remained completely calm and noticed that such rumors about the Royal Italian Navy were spread by the British, and he was surprised that in Berlin these rumors were so readily accepted and believed. The Royal Navy (the earl's voice sounded solemn) had already carried out several bold operations, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy.

To be honest, Hitler did not know about any of those "daring operations" that the Italian fleet carried out.

Ciano also did not know anything about this, but he knew something else: with gigantic efforts made personally by the Duce, the day before yesterday (i.e. November 25) they managed to push a powerful formation of the Italian fleet into the sea, consisting of battleships "Vittorio Veneto" and "Giulio Cesare", divisions of six fine Zara-class heavy cruisers and several destroyer flotillas to intercept and destroy an English convoy bound for Malta

under cover of light forces.

What neither Hitler nor Ciano knew yet was the fact that it was at the moment of their conversation - November 27 - that British light cruisers and destroyers boldly attacked the Italian formation west of Sardinia, immediately covering the enemy with hurricane fire and causing serious damage to the cruiser and three destroyers, one of which had to be taken away in tow. From such behavior of the enemy, the nerves of the commander of the Italian unit, Admiral Campioni, again could not stand it.

He suggested that such brazen behavior of enemy light forces is based on the presence of some powerful British formation nearby. The premonition did not deceive the Italian admiral. Soon, the English battlecruiser Rinaun appeared on the horizon, and planes in the sky, indicating the presence of an English aircraft carrier in the area. The admiral tried to call his own aircraft from the airfields of Cagliari and Elmas in Sardinia, but no one answered him.

Then Campioni decided that he had had enough, and before the Rinaun had time to fire a volley of main caliber, he ordered to leave, dragging the wrecked destroyer in tow.

Hitler told the real truth to the Italian ambassador: he did not want to fight his way to the aid of Mussolini, no matter who he had to fight with. Although the Führer irritated the Führer with the mere fact of their existence, and he considered them to be something between gypsies and Romanians, on November 28 he summoned the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia Markovich, who arrived in Germany, to the so-called "Small Reich Chancellery" in Berchtesgaden. Hitler was extremely frank: if Yugoslavia joins the Axis countries, allows the passage of German troops through its territory and generally takes a "friendly position for Germany", then, even without participating in hostilities, it will receive a solid part of the Greek territory, including the city of Thessaloniki.

Markovič remarked to the Führer that the Yugoslav government was becoming more and more inclined towards the idea of joining the Axis powers. But this, according to the minister, "required careful and thorough preparation."

– What is he up to? - asked Stalin, having familiarized himself with Hitler's directive No. 18, which intelligence, according to Golikov, obtained with great difficulty. The leader got acquainted with the translation of the directive, but did not really understand anything from it.

Leading a pointer across the map, Marshal Shaposhnikov, who after the dismissal of the chief of the General Staff turned into something very similar to the chief of Stalin's personal headquarters, although neither such a position nor such a headquarters existed in nature, explained:

- Everything is very logical. The Germans seal off the Mediterranean, capturing Gibraltar and the Suez Canal zone. With a simultaneous attack on Greece, they deprive the British of virtually any chance of further waging war in the Mediterranean basin and cut off the British mother country from most of the empire. The map turns out to be a very elegant operation.

"So there will be no landing?" What do you think, Boris Mikhailovich? - the leader even took the pipe out of his mouth and put it on the table.

"One thing does not interfere with the other," answered Shaposhnikov, "it may very well be that if this operation succeeds, the British may capitulate or agree to German peace conditions without waiting for the German landing. Or they will no longer be able to provide proper resistance to this landing. The Mediterranean Sea is the key to victory in a European war. If

if the combat training of the Italians was not inferior to the German one, then Hitler would have already broken England.

- What are you offering? Stalin asks his key question.

The marshal's pointer moves to the Black Sea region.

"At present," he continues, "there are only limited German troops in Rumania. There are no German troops in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. If they decide to strike at Greece, then exposing themselves to the blow of our most powerful southern grouping as part of the Southwestern and Southern fronts.

- And why do we need to save the British, - Stalin asks sullenly?

"The whole of Europe must be saved, Comrade Stalin," Shaposhnikov notes cautiously.

The leader is silent.

There was clearly a split among the top leadership of the Armed Forces of the USSR. The General Staff, headed by Kirill Meretskov, proposes to strike with the main forces directly at Germany through Poland, and an auxiliary strike at the Balkans in order to cut off Germany from oil sources. The People's Commissariat of Defense, headed by Semyon Timoshenko, which is joined by the commanders of the two main districts - the Special Western and Kiev - army generals Pavlov and Zhukov, on the contrary, believe that the main blow should be delivered in the south, taking Germany into a semicircle in order to make it easier finish off at the second stage of the operation. The march through the Balkan countries is easier to file and ideologically as a liberation one. But the call for help gives special specificity to the liberation campaigns. About the so-called international aid. There were the right people to ensure this call, and besides, the southern direction was more impressive, since there were actually no German troops there. But any blow in this direction inevitably led to a clash with Germany. Therefore, I so wanted to get the maximum possible without a shot.

From November 17 to 20, the General Staff under the leadership of Tymoshenko hosted the "Bilateral operational-strategic card game", developed by the Chief of the General Staff Meretskov and the Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Vatutin.

The theme of the game was "Offensive operation of the front with a breakthrough of SD." The game was fair, because it reflected the true balance of power and even added 3 extra rifle divisions to the Germans.

Exactly three days of games "blue" - the Germans were surrounded, defeated and destroyed. The army and navy met at Konigsberg.

From November 20 to 22, the Western Special Military District, led by General Pavlov, also famously played, which so swiftly took Warsaw, forcing the Vistula and Oder on the move, that Meretskov hardly stopped him near Berlin, arbitrarily adding "blue" from nowhere that came from 10 rifle and 2 tank divisions.

From November 23 to 25, the Kiev Special Military District, headed by General Zhukov, played. This is where it all got tricky. In reality, there were no German troops in front of Zhukov's front. There were Romanian and Bulgarian armies and negligible forces in the former Czechoslovakia (now called the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia), falling under the blow of adjacent

flanks of Zhukov and Pavlov. But the terrain here was terrible - solid mountains, which left its mark on the entire operation, regardless of the balance of power. Zhukov, who gathered almost all the mountain rifle divisions in his district, solved the problem conscientiously, constantly complicating the tasks of the game for himself and provoking Meretskov's protest: where, they say, will the enemy have so many forces in his sector? Zhukov answered motivatedly, reading the numbers of German, Hungarian, Romanian and even Slovak divisions from the GRU intelligence reports.

One could feel the experienced hand of his chief of staff, General Purkaev, whom Stalin had nearly shot the day before on a tip from the Gestapo.

From November 26 to 28, the Odessa Military District, headed by General Cherevichenko, played. The commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Oktyabrsky, was called to the game. The task of the district, interacting with the ships of the Black Sea Fleet and the Danube Flotilla, was to quickly capture the ports from Constanta to Varna with combined attacks from the sea and land, followed by access to the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

After reviewing the results of the games, Stalin noticed that even in theory, the interaction between the army, aviation and navy leaves much to be desired, but in practice there is probably no interaction at all.

Shaposhnikov still somehow tried to resolve these issues, but after he left the post of chief of the General Staff, Meretskov almost forgot about the fleet against the backdrop of thousand-kilometer fronts. The fleet has its own global tasks, which, by the way, no one in the fleet itself knows, since they are fully known only to Comrade Stalin.

Comrade Stalin was well aware of these tasks. "Whoever owns the sea, owns the world," Admiral Mahan formulated, and the leader of all peoples understood that the old American naval theorist was right, despite all his bourgeois unscience. Lenin, at the mention of the word "fleet", broke into a cry, proving its complete uselessness for the proletarian state, for it was the fleet that frayed all the nerves of the leader of the world proletariat, first putting him in an idiotic position by the Ice Crossing, then by his wholesale flight together with Wrangel to Bizerte from the communist dream and finally finished off with the Kronstadt rebellion, sending the entire Leninist theory of building socialism to the closet. The vengeful Ilyich immediately ordered to sell to Germany all the remnants of the Baltic Fleet at the price of scrap metal, to arrest and shoot all the still surviving naval officers of the imperial fleet (up to and including midshipmen), and the sailors, if it was impossible to shoot or imprison for participating in the Kronstadt mutiny and aiding Wrangel, drive home.

Even then, Stalin realized that something was wrong with the leader of the world proletariat. "Comrade Lenin is sick, and we will not disturb him," Stalin used to say then, starting an open sabotage of the instructions of his leader and teacher. Using his already fairly strong power, Stalin ordered the release of most of the arrested naval officers, who had not yet been shot or tortured to death.

Officers are needed, and Stalin tried to keep them at least until the machine of unprecedented militarism he had launched produced new, class-like naval officers. And he completed his task. Those whom he, at great risk, saved in the 1920s, were shot without much pity in 37-38, since the system of naval schools deployed by Stalin had already managed to produce 14 graduations.

But Comrade Stalin's contribution to the creation of a new fleet was not limited to concerns about its personnel.

Stalin suffered from the fact that he had to slow down the naval program somewhat due to a lack of stock materials and because of the sabotage of the performers. But continued

firmly believe that it was his fleet that was destined to put an end to the sea dominion of England. As for the US and Japanese fleets, according to the leader, by the time the Stalinist program was completed, they should have already destroyed each other. The French fleet had already been virtually destroyed. The British had to deal with the Germans and the Italians. Thus, the leader thought according to the scheme of the naval Olympic Games: the Red Fleet went straight to the final, where he was supposed to meet with the British and, of course, win.

Never before in the world has there been such a grandiose and ambitious program. By the end of 1946, it was planned to build 16 battleships and 16 battle cruisers, 2 aircraft carriers, 28 light cruisers, 20 leaders, 144 destroyers, 96 patrol boats, 204 minesweepers and 408 submarines.

Among the Stalinist military leaders, Admiral Kuznetsov was perhaps the most honest and courageous person, as far as the criminal-wolf situation that reigned in the corridors of the Kremlin allowed. In 1939, taking the post of People's Commissar of the Navy from Stalin's hands, the young admiral, who even in his own dreams had never seen himself superior to the commander of a ship, dared to set an indispensable condition for the leader of all peoples: to stop shooting naval specialists and free everyone who ended up in the camps. straight from the decks of warships. Stalin chuckled but agreed. And how many times Stalin forgot about this, how many times Kuznetsov reminded him of this, fighting for each of his people like a gladiator, because every minute he risked his own head. And almost always got his way [43].

If Stalin sincerely loved the fleet and even allowed Admiral Kuznetsov to keep a certain number of "class enemies" in the cadres, then the leader of all peoples had some strange attitude towards the air force. With all his desire, Stalin could not declare himself the creator of the domestic fleet and was officially considered only the creator of the Northern Fleet, which was immortalized on a huge marble slab immured in the rock at the main base of the fleet in Polyarny.

As for aviation, the Pravda newspaper wrote back in September 1936: "We, who observe every day the work of Comrade Stalin in the field of aviation, his concern for its human cadres, can say without any exaggeration that the creator and The creator of our Soviet aviation, both its material part and its personnel, is our teacher and leader Comrade Stalin. And at the 18th Party Congress, Stalin was proclaimed "head of our aviation", "great designer", "chief technologist", "father of all heroic victories" and "father of all heroes".

And I must say that all these quotes, no matter how ridiculous they may look today, were not mere verbiage or glorification, if we recall that in the mid-20s, Stalin received from Lenin a huge, poorly trained and undisciplined crowd, called the Red Army, armed royal three-rulers, pikes and checkers, with a small artillery park. But by the end of 1937, the aircraft fleet of the Soviet Air Force exceeded 8,000 combat vehicles, and there was not a single foreign model among them! Add to this dozens of established aviation records, flights of unprecedented range, including a flight over the North Pole to America, count the number of trained engineers, technicians, mechanics, pilots, navigators, radio gunners, and do not forget the aviation infrastructure that has grown out of the ground. , - and you will understand what it means to create a miracle only by the example of the Air Force alone.

Stalin loved pilots so much that he even once offered Valery Chkalov the post of chief of the NKVD, which can be considered the highest manifestation of the leader's love for the famous, but simple pilot. Chkalov refused, and therefore died soon under very mysterious circumstances. And he is not the only one, for, as the ancients noted, "a loving hand is stronger than all and punishes."